

# **AN EXPLORATION OF STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE 'MISSION TO SERVE' IN SECOND-LEVEL FEE CHARGING SPIRITAN SCHOOLS IN IRELAND**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education, is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Erica Sheehan)

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Date: September 8<sup>th</sup> 2016

## Dedication

To Frank

*'Scaffolding' by Seamus Heaney*

*Masons, when they start upon a building,  
Are careful to test out the scaffolding;  
Make sure that planks won't slip at busy points,  
Secure all ladders, tighten bolted joints.  
And yet all this comes down when the job's done  
Showing off walls of sure and solid stone.  
So if, my dear, there sometimes seem to be  
Old bridges breaking between you and me  
Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall,  
Confident that we have built our wall.*

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## **Glossary of Acronyms; Definitions and Organisations**

**Catholic Religious Congregation.** An order of men or women who take vows and are approved by the Catholic church

**Chapter.** A general meeting of delegates from a Province of a Religious Congregation

**Congregation.** The term used for Roman Catholic Apostolic Institutes

**CORI.** Conference of Religious of Ireland

**CPSMA.** Catholic Primary School Management Association

**CSP.** Catholic Schools Partnership

**CSSp.** Congregation of the Holy Spirit

**DEA/SET.** Des Places Educational Association (now referred to as the SET: The Spiritan Education Trust). In response to the Education Act (1998), the Spiritans set up des Places Educational Association (DEA) to act as the patron body for all Spiritan schools and colleges in Ireland.

**DES.** The Department of Education and Skills

**ESRI.** Economic and Social Research Institute

**Fee charging.** There are 51 second-level fee charging (also termed fee-paying or private) schools in Ireland

**HEI.** Higher Education Institution

**IDEA.** Irish Development Education Association

**OECD.** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**P.** Principal

**Pisa.** Programme for International Student Assessment

**PLC.** Post-Leaving Certificate

**PR.** Patron Representative

**PT.** Parent

**Patron/Trustee of a Catholic school.** A patron is legally obliged 'to ensure and foster the advancement of education and to further the aims and purposes of Roman Catholic education in colleges and schools in Ireland' (CORI 1996)

**PLT.** Provincial Leadership Team

**Pre-conciliar.** Pre-Vatican II

**Province.** The regional organisational structure of a Religious Congregation

**School Leavers Survey.** The School Leavers Survey is a long-running study, conducted by the ESRI and funded by the DES, which examines young peoples' experiences while at school and their experiences of the transition from second-level education to labour force participation, further education, or economic inactivity.

**Social Integration Programme.** In striving to be more socially inclusive the Social Integration Programme (also referred to as Social Diversity Programme) as operated in Belvedere College offers second-level education to students who would not otherwise attend the College due to social and financial barriers. Approximately 10% of the student body attends the school with the support of the St Vincent de Paul. Applicants are not selected on academic, sporting or musical ability.

**SPIRASI.** Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative

**Spiritans.** An international Catholic Missionary Religious Order

**SRL.** Spiritan Rule of Life

**SVP.** St Vincent de Paul Society

**Vat II.** The Second Vatican Council

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## **Abstract**

### **An exploration of stakeholders' perceptions of the 'mission to serve' in second-level fee charging Spiritan schools in Ireland**

**Erica Sheehan**

Formerly known as 'The Holy Ghost Fathers', the Spiritans are an international Catholic missionary religious order founded in France in 1703. The Spiritans identify service of those most in need as the preferred focus of the congregation's mission. In an effort to secure English-speaking priests for the foreign missions, the Spiritans moved to Ireland and in 1860 founded Blackrock College. Today, through their patron body, the Spiritan Education Trust (SET), they act as patron to five second-level fee charging schools. Fee charging schools represent 8% of the 723 second-level schools in Ireland and cater for 7% of the total enrolment. In October 2007 the Department of Education and Skills announced that no new fee charging schools would be granted state recognition. Criticisms of fee charging schools as agents of educational inequality and social class division are extensively documented. At the same time the public domain is characterised by an absence of literature that examines the contribution that fee charging schools make to Irish society.

This qualitative intrinsic case study, shaped by a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, explores the understanding and nature of the Spiritan mission of service currently offered in second-level fee charging Spiritan schools, from the perspective of principals, patron and parents. The perception that these schools, by the nature of their socio-economic composition and through their fee charging structures, serve the rich as opposed to the poor, is also addressed. Employing semi-structured interviews, survey questionnaire and documentary analysis, the 'insider' researcher acts as a facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction.

This study reveals an uneasy tension surrounding Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools. Findings indicate a rich tapestry of opinion and perspective among participants in relation to their perception of the Spiritan mission of service and suggest that the nature of the service offered tends to be narrow as opposed to integral. Findings also indicate a commitment from key stakeholders to exploring creative ways of responding to the challenge to bear witness to the espoused Spiritan mission to serve the poor in an integral manner. This research concludes with a series of recommendations, arising from the findings, which are intended to act as a stimulus for further reflection among the stakeholder groups. This research also contributes to a public understanding of how a particular religious order conceives of its mission in a contemporary context.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study explores the understanding of service as perceived by stakeholders in second-level fee charging Spiritan schools in Ireland. It seeks to report and interpret how principals, parents and trustees perceive the Spiritan mission to serve, and most especially to serve, the poor.

Chapter One presents the research question and outlines the purpose and context of the study. The genesis of the research question is explained, the research participants are introduced, and the position of the researcher undertaking the study is presented. The philosophical assumptions underpinning the study are provided. Finally, the scope and structure of the study are outlined. As this study is concerned with how a particular religious order (i.e. the Spiritans) conceives of its mission in a contemporary context, it is necessary to briefly explain who the Spiritans are and to describe their involvement in education in Ireland. Chapter One provides a brief overview of the Spiritan mission in education in Ireland within the context of, the current restructuring and ‘reconfiguration’ of trusteeship (Collins 2012; The Forum Advisory Group 2012) and, the widely documented criticisms of fee charging schools as agents of educational inequality and social class division (Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch 1988, 1999, 2001; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998). The understanding of ‘mission’ and ‘service’, employed throughout the study, is presented in Chapter One.

#### **1.2 The Research Question**

Most religious communities’ involvement in schools began with a concern for the poor (Norman 2003, p. 96). Despite the fact that service of the ‘most poor’ constitutes the preferred focus of Spiritan mission (SRL 4, cited in Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012, p. 8; DEA 2006, p. 10; Daly 1986, p. 34), the Spiritans have ‘traditionally been associated with exclusive boarding schools’ (Keating 2006, p.



63). Spiritan involvement in education has been a source of contention among Spiritans themselves and has been discussed at length at numerous Chapter meetings (Lehane 2000, pp. 75–77; Rivard 2013, pp. 11–13; Spiritan Province of Ireland 2011). McEvoy (2014, p. 24) states:

Two things give rise to a feeling of unease by many in the Province: ‘(a) the fact that four of the five Spiritan Colleges are private fee charging institutions (the ‘Option for the Poor’ cannot be realised by schools which exclude the poor’); (b) the widely-held perception in Ireland of Spiritan schools as exclusive bastions of privilege, serving and perpetuating a social elite class in Irish society.

Criticisms of fee charging schools as agents of educational inequality that perpetuate social class division and serve the rich as opposed to the poor are also extensively documented (Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch 1988, 1999, 2001; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998). Nevertheless, there exists, to date, no systematic empirical corpus of data exploring the mission of service of fee charging Spiritan schools from the perspectives of the key stakeholders within these schools. This study seeks to fill that gap.

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the service offered in second-level fee charging Spiritan schools from the perspective of three key stakeholder groups: parents, principals and patron body. This study aims to facilitate an open and balanced dialogue between, the previously silent voices of those stakeholder groups ‘within’ fee charging Spiritan schools, Spiritan documentation, and the widely documented criticisms of fee charging schools as agents of educational inequality. Through presenting multiple perspectives and giving a voice to those who believe fee charging schools still have a positive contribution to make to Irish society, this study intends to facilitate a more open and balanced dialogue in relation to this contested issue. It also seeks to stimulate reflection that may inform future practice (Creswell 2012, p. 63) in relation to Spiritan education in Ireland. The study explores the ‘recurring’ (Egan 2014, p. 5) and ‘uneasy’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 12) tension surrounding Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools and the apparent contradiction between the espoused and operative mission (in relation to service of the poor) of second-level fee charging Spiritan schools.

Despite the fact that the knowledge generated by this intrinsic case study (Stake 2005, 1995) is not intended to be transferable to other fee charging schools, it is worth noting that ‘even intrinsic case study can be seen as a small step toward grand generalization’ (Stake 2005, p. 448; Flyvbjerg 2011, p. 304). This case study aims, through its documentary analysis and interview structure, to deliver a ‘thick description’ (Stake 2005, p. 457) of the case, which in turn will invite the reader ‘to explore competing visions of the context, [and] to become immersed in and merge with the new realities to comprehend’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 6).

Questions to be addressed in this study include the following: What was, historically, and is, currently, the mission of second-level fee charging Spiritan schools in carrying out ‘service to one’s neighbour, particularly the most poor and vulnerable, the work of justice’ (Irish Episcopal Conference 2010, p. 55), as perceived by three key stakeholder groups?; Do these schools, by the very nature of their socio-economic composition and through their fee charging structures, serve the rich as opposed to the poor?; How is diversity, most notably social diversity, promoted in these schools?; What role do these schools play in the current education system?; Do these schools act as agents of transformation within the current education system or do they perpetuate educational inequality and social class division?

### **1.3 Context of the study**

This study is situated within the context of the involvement of the Spiritans, a Catholic missionary congregation, in the provision of education in second-level fee charging schools in Ireland. The broader context of the debate regarding educational inequality forms the larger backdrop to the study.

#### **1.3.1 Second-level fee charging schools in Ireland and the debate regarding educational inequality**

Fee charging schools represent 8% of the 723 second-level schools in Ireland and cater for 7% of the total enrolment (DES 2013, p. 5). In October 2007 ‘the decision was reached that that no new fee charging schools would be granted state recognition’ (ibid., p. 5).

What differentiates fee charging schools from all other post-primary schools is the capacity to raise funds through mandatory fees, while in receipt of exchequer funding. The fees charged are mandatory in that initial admission to the fee charging school or ongoing participation is contingent on payment of the fees. Fee charging schools are often referred to as “private” schools. However, under the Education Act 1998, they are recognised schools and are more correctly titled “private state aided schools”. The distinction between them and all other recognised schools is the lower amount of public funding provided and the entitlement to charge fees that applies in the case of the fee charging schools. (DES 2013, p. 6)

In the 2011/2012 school year, 333,458 students were enrolled in non-fee charging schools and 25,589 students were enrolled in fee charging schools. Enrolments in fee charging schools rose steadily in the 1990s and in the following decade, but have fallen slightly in recent years. At present there are 51 second-level fee charging schools in Ireland and most recent figures indicate that student numbers in second-level fee charging schools ‘are on the rise again as family finances steady and recover in the post-recession era’ (Treacy and Donnelly 2016). Much heated public discourse surrounds the issue of fee charging schools in Irish society today and the question of state support for second-level fee charging schools constitutes what is ‘arguably the most divisive [question] in Irish education today, pitting parent against parent, teacher against teacher, and school against school’ (McGuire 2013).

Ninety percent of the intake of fee charging schools are from social classes 1 and 2 (professional and managerial groups) and 3% are from classes 5, 6 and 7 (the semi-skilled and unskilled classes) (Lynch and Lodge 2002, pp. 40–42). The development of sophisticated statistical methods, such as multi-level modelling in the 1980s and 1990s, has resulted in improved access to reliable data in studying, for example, school effects and the relationship between educational stratification and social mobility (Breen and Jonsson 2005; Smyth 1999). In Ireland, the 1980s witnessed the development of Equality Studies due, in part, to the significant and extensively documented failure of liberal policies (both nationally and internationally) to eliminate major social inequalities (Lynch 1999). According to Lynch (1999, p. 42), equality is a complex subject which requires ‘an inter-disciplinary and pluri-disciplinary mode of inquiry for adequate comprehensive analysis’.

The literature in relation to equality and the interrelated nature of equalities in gender, social class, race, etc. is ‘voluminous’ (Breen and Jonsson 2005, p. 224). Substantial studies of social class-related educational inequality in Ireland, though dated, are numerous (Breen and Whelan 1993; Raftery and Hout 1993; Hannan and Boyle 1987). The findings of research into the educational advantages in relation to enhanced academic and non-academic student outcomes as well as increased access to additional resources and discretionary income afforded to students who attend socially-stratified fee charging second-level schools are widely documented (DES 2013; OECD 2012; Borooah, Dineen and Lynch 2010; Smyth and McCoy 2009; Smyth 2009; ESRI 2007; O’Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Smyth 1999; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Lynch 1988; Hannan et al. 1996).

### **1.3.2 Second-level Catholic schools and the voluntary sector**

There are 376 voluntary secondary schools, 254 vocational schools and 92 community/comprehensive schools in Ireland (ESRI 2013, p. 7). All second-level Catholic and Spiritan schools in Ireland are voluntary bodies that ‘belong neither to the public sector nor the private sector’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 4; CSP 2014, pp. 14–15). Though not established or run by the state, these schools are ‘based on a mission or vision as articulated by some individual or group’ (CSP 2014, p. 14), in this case the Spiritans; they are ‘not for profit’ (ibid., p. 14) but must ‘provide some public benefit’ (ibid., p. 14) and are funded from ‘public, private and individual donations’ (ibid., p. 15). Sixty percent of all fee charging schools in Ireland are under Catholic management (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 31).

### **1.3.3 The Spiritans: a missionary congregation with a root in education**

The story of the Spiritans, an international Catholic missionary religious order, begins in France in 1703, when Claude Poullart des Places founded a seminary dedicated to the Holy Ghost. The purpose of the seminary was to educate poor students to ‘be ready for everything under the control of their Superiors; ready to serve in hospices, to preach the gospel to the poor ... ready not merely to accept but to love wholeheartedly and prefer above everything else the lowly and the laborious positions in the Church for which it is difficult to find ministries’ (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2011; Rule and Constitutions Chapter I (II) 1734, cited in Daly 1986, p.

45; Koren 1983, p. 13). Over a century later (1848), Francis Libermann ‘brought his newly founded missionary congregation (The Society of the Holy Heart of Mary) into the Spiritan family to form the Congregation we know today’ (DEA 2015, p. 82). From the very beginning, service of those most in need has been the *raison d’être* of the Spiritans (Farragher 2000, p. 6; Ethos Committee 2015, pp. 18–19; DEA 2015, p. 41; McEvoy 2014, pp. 4–5, 24; Egan 2014, p. 5).

The evangelisation of the poor is our purpose. Therefore, we go especially to peoples, groups and individuals who have not yet heard the message of the Gospel or who have scarcely heard it, to those whose needs are the greatest, and to the oppressed. We also willingly accept tasks for which the Church has difficulty in finding workers. (SRL 4, cited in Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012, p. 8)

From the congregation’s foundation, Spiritan missionaries undertook a variety of missionary works, ‘preaching missions in rural parishes, and especially working with the working classes in town’ (Daly, 1986, p. 34). Today Spiritan missionaries are to be found in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania. Formerly known as ‘The Holy Ghost Fathers’, the Spiritans recently reverted to their original name, which they believe to be ‘more inclusive of the reality of the Congregation today, which is made up of priests, brothers, sisters, and lay men and women who participate in the one mission of Christ’ (DEA 2011, p. 3). They will be referred to as the Spiritans throughout this study.

#### **1.3.4 Spiritan Mission in Irish schools: a brief overview**

In terms of their mission in Ireland, the original intention of the Spiritans was very clear; ‘involvement in Ireland was to be a very limited operation: just sufficient to secure the missionaries required for the English-speaking territories’ (Farragher 1988, p. 120; Farragher and Wyer 1995, p. 56). Though principally committed to ‘improving the quality’ of their own aspirants, the French priests also made a ‘welcome contribution to the Irish educational system’ (Farragher 2011, p. 476), providing a Catholic education (DEA 2015, p. 82) rooted in the ‘French tradition of liberal education’ (ibid., p. 82). Blackrock College was founded in 1860, followed by Rockwell College in 1864, St Mary’s College in 1890, St Michael’s College in 1944 and Templeogue College in 1966.

An organic entity, Spiritan mission in Irish schools has evolved throughout the centuries, from its nineteenth century mandate to ‘find personnel for the work of bringing the Christian faith to black Africa in territories under the control of the British government’, to its emphasis in the twentieth century on ‘the provision of good Catholic education for boys and girls through which mission vocations could be nurtured’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 9). In response to the Education Act (1998), the Spiritans set up des Places Educational Association (DEA), also known as the Spiritan Education Trust (SET), to act as patron to all Spiritan schools in Ireland. Today, through the SET, the Spiritans act as patron to nine Spiritan schools/colleges in Ireland, six second-level (Blackrock College, Willow Park Senior School, Rockwell College, St Mary’s College, St Michael’s College and Templeogue College) and three primary (Willow Park Junior School, St Mary’s Junior School and St Michael’s Junior School) schools. The SET are a joint patron of Holy Family Community School, Rathcoole. The Spiritan Education Ethos is guided by, and grounded in, seven core values. These are: 1. Openness to the Spirit; 2. Sense of Community; 3. Option for the Poor; 4. Commitment to Service; 5. Global Vision; 6. High Educational Standards; and 7. Personal and Faith Development (for a full description of these core values see Appendix A).

### **1.3.5 Trusteeship of Spiritan schools**

Like many other religious congregations, the Spiritans were, in recent decades, ‘endeavouring to identify discuss understand internalize and grapple with the legal issues of the term *Trusteeship* (Collins 2012, pp. 20–21). According to CORI (1996, p. 6), ‘[t]rustees ... have two distinct types of responsibility in relation to the schools: those which relate to ensuring that the school in its ethos and otherwise is consistent with the founding intention (i.e. the trust), and those which derive from the legal and financial liabilities associated with ownership’. Reflecting upon the original charisms of their founders in determining their future involvement (or otherwise) in education, religious congregations are asking themselves if their traditional role as managers in education will ‘(a) best serve their mission as a religious community and (b) serve the common good in Irish society’ (Norman 2003, p. 94).

‘From its outset, Spiritan mission has been marked by dedication to an ethos of service to the poor and marginalised in society’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 4). The Spiritans are a missionary order, ‘Spiritans today are on mission on five continents and present in some fifty-five countries’ (DEA 2015, p. 52), with a strong root in education. The issue of trusteeship is complicated, firstly by the fact that Spiritan involvement in education as an apostolate in general has been a source of contention and division among Spiritans (Rivard 2013, p. 7), and secondly, by the apparent paradox between the founding intention to serve the most poor and Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools. In reference to the latter point, Rivard (2013, p. 12) makes the following remark: ‘there was a time when many Spiritans questioned the validity of various Spiritan educational enterprises. The example was given of colleges catering for upper middle class boys which seemed to distance the Spiritans from the fundamental charism of our Congregation – that of service among the poorest’. Five of the six second-level Spiritan schools in Ireland are fee charging.

The ‘recurring uneasy tension’ (Egan 2014, p. 5) surrounding Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools, while it is ‘acknowledged and needs to be further addressed’, is not, however, ‘a new issue’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 11). In his address at Rockwell’s annual Prize Day in 1987, Fr. James Hurley CSSp. stated the following:

Private high fee boarding schools may seem a luxury in our present socio-economic and political climate. The accusation of being elitist and of perpetuating a type of education that in turn keeps the privileged in a position of power and influence has been levelled against Rockwell as against other similar schools. It is difficult to counter these arguments unless the school can show that it is doing its utmost to bring Gospel values of justice and peace into prominence, not only in our own relationships within the school but above all in our awareness of the plight of our less privileged members of society. (Hurley 1987, cited in Ethos Committee 2015, p. 11)

#### **1.3.5.1 Spiritan Chapter (2012)**

The tradition of Chapter is as old as the history of Religious Life itself. Rooted in the practice of the early Christian communities it is a gathering, in faith, of people who choose to live their lives in fidelity to the Gospel. The measure of this fidelity is the Rule that they have given themselves in the spirit of their founding charism and vision. (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012, p. 1)

In the context of an Ireland that is ‘changed, changed utterly’, and against the background of a ‘discredited institutional church’, the Chapter meeting of 2012 was, for Irish Spiritans, ‘a chapter of refoundation’ (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2012, pp. 2–4), a ‘journey of faith (and therefore risk) to the heart of who we (Spiritans) say we are’ (ibid., p. 2) navigated amid the changing tide of trusteeship (Collins 2012; The Forum Advisory Group 2012; CORI 1996). Chapter (2012) called all Spiritans ‘to a deeper Spiritan authenticity in fidelity to the spirit of our founders’ (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2012, p. 4).

In its attempt to deepen Spiritan authenticity, Chapter (2012) addressed a number of Arenas of Change. Arena 4, entitled ‘Education for Transformation’, focused on the Spiritan apostolate in education. Aware that Spiritan schools ‘are perceived to be places of advantage rather than disadvantage’ (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2011), Arena 4 called for an appraisal of Spiritan mission in education and sought to ensure that all Spiritan schools ‘give witness to the vision of Spiritan mission as found in [their] Rule of Life’ (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2012, p. 12). Through this appraisal (co-ordinated by the Provincial Leadership Team in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders), the feasibility of ‘including all (Spiritans) schools in the non-fee-paying sector’ was also to be considered (ibid., p. 13).

#### **1.3.5.2 Decisions and challenges arising from Chapter (2012)**

Which would be better, what sticks or what falls through? Or does the choice itself create the value? (Heaney 1987, *The Haw Lantern*)

The Mission Audit (McEvoy 2014) that emerged from Chapter (2012) explored the various works of the Spiritans Province of Ireland ‘in the context of the contemporary understanding of Spiritan mission, the changed complexion of Irish society, and the exigencies of personnel and other resources available to the Province’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 2). McEvoy (2014, p. 9) describes Chapter (2012) as ‘a kind of manifesto, setting out the collective aspirations and intentions for the Province into the medium-term, in language which is up-beat and inspiring’, but points out that ‘translating this manifesto into operational effect in a climate of increasingly scarce personnel and financial resources poses a conundrum for the Provincial leadership, and prompts it to engage in a measured but rigorous evaluative process to which this Report is



intended to contribute’. In regard to the future of Spiritan trusteeship, McEvoy draws attention to a number of sobering practicalities for consideration. McEvoy (2014, pp. 7–8, 24) notes that:

As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013, the Irish Province comprised 261 Spiritans – 10% fewer than was the case two years previously. Of the total Irish Province membership, 81 are serving abroad, 40 are in ministry in Ireland and 140 are retired ... The age profile is ... advancing inexorably: the average age is now 74 and Spiritan ethos ‘is no longer embodied in a clerical presence at school level’.

The Mission Audit (2014), which raised the concern that the province could ‘divest itself’ of its fee charging schools, proved ‘difficult reading’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 8) for personnel in these schools. Whilst not advocating ‘disengagement’ from the schools, McEvoy draws attention to the ‘significant ... economic cost of trusteeship estimated to be €25 per student p.a.’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 26; ESRI 2013, p. 9) and to the political push towards ‘a collaboration between the different Catholic trust bodies which may ultimately result in a single trust body for all Catholic schools’ (McEvoy, p. 26). The ESRI (2013, p. 8) noted that ‘there is growing recognition among religious orders who founded voluntary secondary schools that existing arrangements for trusteeship are not sufficient, and that new models of funding and trusteeship will be required to ensure their continuation’.

The Spiritan Ethos and Faith Development Appraisal Report (Ethos Committee 2015) (referred to hereafter as ‘The Ethos Appraisal’), which also emerged from Chapter (2012), sought to highlight the role of Spiritan schools in Spiritan mission and ‘to see what challenges and opportunities need to be addressed’ (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012, p. 12). Findings from the Ethos Appraisal (2015) indicated a strong commitment to the preservation of Spiritan identity, (which acted as a foundation to, and provided cohesion for, the educational enterprise in Spiritan schools) and to the development of Spiritan mission among all the stakeholder groups as a collaborative exercise within Spiritan schools (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 7).

Based on the findings from the Ethos Appraisal (2015), Mission Audit (2014) and other consultations undertaken, the decision was made by the Spiritans to continue their patronage of schools and to retain the fee charging status of their schools. This study ran concurrent with Chapter (2012), The Mission Audit (2014) and The Ethos Appraisal (2015).

#### **1.4 Defining ‘Mission’ and ‘Service’**

In his reflection on the Mission Audit (2014), Egan (2014, p. 3) draws a distinction between a religious understanding of mission ‘as oriented to “conversion”’ and a more widespread and ‘purely secular’ understanding, which indicates ‘the aims and purposes, the ideals and goals of any organisation, business or otherwise’ (ibid., p. 3). The definition of mission employed in this study incorporates both these understandings. The definition of ‘service’ employed in this study is derived from the work of Catholic social justice theologian, Donal Dorr (2012). In his comprehensive historical overview of the Catholic church’s mission to serve the poor, Dorr (2012) draws a distinction between ‘integral’ and ‘narrow’ diakonia (i.e. service). According to Dorr, service in its narrow sense refers only to works of charity (e.g. fundraising, emergency relief). In its integral sense, however, it is inclusive both of works of charity and of a ‘prophetic challenge to injustice in the world’ (Dorr 2012, pp. 348–349).

#### **1.5 The Position of the ‘Insider’ Researcher Undertaking Sensitive Research**

Thomas states that ‘research projects often start with some special knowledge, noticing something interesting or unusual, putting two and two together and, with a spark of curiosity, a research project is fired and ready to go’ (Thomas 2011, p. 86). In preparation for Chapter (2012), the Spiritans held a Day of Reflection on Spiritan education in November 2011. Representatives from their schools and other related ministries attended this meeting, during which a document entitled ‘Spiritans Education: Reflection Paper’ (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2011) was circulated for discussion. I was among the attendees. Aware that their schools ‘are perceived to be places of advantage rather than disadvantage’, the document stated that ‘we, as Spiritans religious have to seriously ask questions around our involvement in fee-

paying education’ (ibid.). The document called for an ‘honest and deep appraisal of Spiritan contribution to education in Ireland’ (ibid.). The ‘real-life issue’ (Crotty 1998, p. 13) that is the uneasy tension between the preferred focus of Spiritan mission to serve the most poor and their involvement in fee charging schools generated a stimulating and at times highly emotive discussion at this Day of Reflection. The energy and passion that characterised the discussion prompted further exploration of this apparent paradox. This marked the ‘official’ beginning of my research journey, and this study is the result of that engagement.

From the outset of this study, I was aware that the subject matter was of a sensitive nature and could prove challenging to undertake. The question was framed and reframed over and over throughout the study. In the very initial stages of the research I was concerned about access (that I would get it) and participation (that it would happen). At the time of attending the Spiritan Day of Reflection, I was in my fifteenth year as a teacher in a Spiritan fee charging school. I started the study, therefore, with ‘special knowledge’ (Thomas 2011, p. 86) I had gained from my prolonged involvement (Creswell 2012, p. 470; Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 302) working on a campus comprising three fee charging Spiritan schools. At the heart of this knowledge was my awareness of the seven core values (Appendix A) that characterise the espoused Spiritan mission in education and my observations (see Chapter Three) of the operative Spiritan mission based on my experience. I was a member of the Spiritan Development Education Working Group (2013–2015) and have recently become a member the Ethos Working Group (Jan 2016). In June 2015 I was appointed deputy principal of Willow Park Senior School.

The key informants or ‘élite interviewees’ (Kennedy et al. 2008, p. 405), i.e. the five principals and patron representative, who participated in this study occupy ‘positions of power and influence’ (ibid., p. 405) within Spiritan education. Although the views of these informants ‘should be considered to be informed by their organisational status and their personal [and] professional experience’ the views expressed by any one of them ‘should not be considered to be necessarily representative of the organisation in which they work’ (ibid., p. 405). Kennedy et al. (2008, pp. 405-406) go on to state that ‘it could, then, be argued that the fundamental purpose of élite interviewing is not to identify the factual truth, if indeed such a thing can be

identified, but to explore issues of perception, interaction and individual influence by virtue of position'. All the key informants in this study are known to me. In relation to two of the key informants I have worked alongside them and/or known them for twenty years. They know me as a newly appointed deputy principal and as a religious educator with a particular interest in development education as a vehicle for Spiritan mission.

Adopting the stance of an insider researcher presents opportunities and challenges when conducting research. Insider status can be 'revelatory or blinding' (Pelias 2011, p. 662). It may provide a 'more rapid and more complete acceptance' by participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p. 55) and ensure a level of trust, openness and a willingness among participants to share their experiences because 'there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness; it is as if they feel, "You are one of us and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don't understand)"' (ibid., p. 58). This in turn may result in 'a greater depth to the data gathered' (ibid., p. 58). Insider status may provide 'tacit knowledge and a unique perspective of the research environment, something to which the outsider is not privy (Ladden 2015, p. 109; Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p. 58) or conversely, it may blind the researcher to 'operative cultural logics' (Pelias 2011, p. 663). Insider research does not 'per se, guarantee access to hidden information or the formation of trust' and is complicated by the 'ethical implications of sharing insider knowledge with a wider audience' (Ladden 2015, p. 110). This presents challenges for the researcher. Familiarity might lead to, the oversharing of information or, conversely and adversely in terms of the study, reticence. All key informants in this study were extremely articulate and, in my considered view, were honest and forthcoming with their views in the semi-structured interviews undertaken (see Chapter Four).

Insider status also has the potential 'to impede the research process' (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p. 58). As an insider, my perceptions might be clouded by my personal experience and, my membership of the group could result in an interview that is shaped by my experience and not the participants (ibid., p. 58). It is however important to note that 'holding membership in a group does not 'denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not

denote complete difference’ (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p. 60). Researcher reflexivity and the presentation of raw data (in the form of extensive quotations from key informants, prior to, and distinct from, an interpretation of the data) which ‘might well reduce the potential concerns associated with insider membership. (ibid., p. 59) were employed in this study.

It is perhaps more accurate and less restrictive to conceive of the role of the researcher in a more fluid and porous manner. The dichotomy of insider versus outsider status in research is ‘overly simplistic.’ (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p. 60). As researchers we can ‘only ever occupy the space between...with the costs and benefits this status affords’ (ibid., pp. 60-61). The key ingredient is not insider or outsider status ‘but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience’.(ibid., p. 59).

For a full outline of the research methodology and of the role of the researcher employed see Chapter Three.

## **1.6 The Educational Philosophy Underpinning this Study**

Based on an understanding of the Catholic school as later outlined in numerous national and international church documents (Pope Pius XI 1929, para. 8–11; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1977, para. 58; The Irish Catholic Bishops 2008, p. 6; The Irish Episcopal Conference 2010, p. 55), the assumption underlying this study and held by the researcher is that education is a social good (Lynch 1999) and that ‘inequalities in education are unjust and must be changed’ (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 6).

## **1.7 The Research Participants**

Representatives from three stakeholder groups (parents, principals, patron body) were chosen as participants for this study, as they are the providers and/or consumers of fee charging Spiritan education in Ireland today. All three groups have chosen to invest in and/or to assume responsibility for guiding, shaping and upholding the ethos of fee charging Spiritan schools. Referring to its current context, the schools' patron body and boards of management 'continue to uphold and develop the characteristic spirit of [Spiritán] schools' (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 9). Findings from the Ethos Appraisal (2015) found 'a strong desire for the Schools to continue as Spiritan schools' (ibid., p. 8) among parents and management and suggest that, in relation to delivering Spiritan education, senior management within Spiritan schools are 'not only continuing what they inherited but are developing it' (ibid., p. 11).

Teachers and students (past and present) were not selected for research purposes. Although teachers and students play a vital role in shaping the ethos of a school, their capacity to influence decisions with regard to the development of Spiritan mission in schools is limited. It could also be argued that teachers and students in fee charging schools have not made a deliberate choice to be members of fee charging Spiritan schools. In the case of students, their parents made the decision for them and in the case of teachers it could be argued that their decision to teach in a fee charging Spiritan school was more likely in response to job availability rather than that they deliberately sought out such schools. Based on the high numbers of past pupils teaching in fee charging Spiritan schools, as I discovered in the process of undertaking this study, the latter point is, however, open to debate. Although I considered including all second-level Spiritan schools in this study, the fact that there is only one non-fee charging second-level Spiritan school led to the decision not to include it, as it would be too easily identifiable.

## **1.8 The Scope of the Research**

This study will focus on the ‘service’ dimension constitutive of the identity and mission of fee charging Spiritan schools as it is perceived by parents, principals and patron body. Though constitutive, service is one dimension of Catholic and specifically Spiritan mission, which is a multi-dimensional/multi-faceted reality (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 25; Grace 2013, pp. 86–87; Irish Episcopal Conference 2010, pp. 44–55; Keating 2006, p. 39; McGrady 2006, pp. 145–190). A full evaluation or appraisal of all the characteristics that define the mission of a Catholic or Spiritan school lies beyond the scope of this study. Though also pertinent to the research question, an exploration of the perspectives of other relevant stakeholders, e.g. teachers, ancillary staff, lies beyond the scope of this study.

Reference will be made to what Collins (2012, p. 67) terms the ‘solemn voices’, i.e. the authoritative ecclesial documents pertaining to the mission of the Catholic school in order to set a context for the type of service offered by the Catholic school in general and Spiritan schools in particular. An in-depth analysis of these ecclesial documents themselves will not be undertaken. As access to the provincial archives could not be facilitated, analysis of documents was also limited. Although this study seeks to examine integral service as constitutive of the mission of a Spiritan school, a full exploration of all the ways in which the ‘prophetic call to justice’ (Dorr 2012, p. 348) can be realised within the Spiritan school lies beyond the scope of this study.

In exploring the perceived lack of diversity within fee charging Spiritan schools, this study will focus solely on the issue of social diversity in economic terms. A full analysis of all the widely researched and documented criticisms of fee charging schools, e.g. their inclusion, or lack thereof, of students with special needs etc., lies beyond the scope of this study. As this study addresses only second-level fee charging Spiritan schools, of which there are five (Willow Park Senior School, Blackrock College, Rockwell College, St Mary’s College and St Michael’s College), a definitive overview of the Spiritan mission of service in all (nine) Spiritan schools in Ireland lies beyond the scope of this study.

In relation to the qualitative parental survey questionnaire undertaken, (Appendix D) only three of the five second-level fee charging Spiritan schools provided a 'viable' sample (see Chapter Three). While all schools agreed in principle to undertake the parental survey questionnaire, a number of unforeseen and tragic life events affecting School 5 occurred. In consultation with my supervisors and a 'critical friend', I decided that it would be inappropriate to request a survey to be conducted from this school. In relation to School 4, only five responses were submitted. Nevertheless, in a concerted effort to remain faithful to the research methodology employed in this study, all responses were included.

It is also important to note that the scope of the Spiritan congregation's mission in Ireland is not confined to patronage of secondary and primary schools. In collaboration with a number of congregations, Kimmage Mission Institute Theologate was established by the Spiritans in 1990. The 'tradition of higher learning and intellectual enquiry at Kimmage is carried on up to the present in the shape of Kimmage Development Studies Centre (KDSC), which exists as an entity in its own right which enjoys a strategic partnership with NUIM' (McEvoy 2014, p. 8) and which has been acknowledged as the key provider of capacity for Ireland's engagement with the developing world for the past 40 years (*ibid.*, p. 20).

Spiritan mission in an Irish context also expands beyond the microcosm of the Irish education system. 'An Tobar' at Ardbraaccan, a 'Spiritan-led inter-congregational ... community centred on prayer, eucharist, social justice and ecology', (*ibid.*, p. 16) is making links with disadvantaged groups in the community (the unemployed, settled travellers and persons with learning difficulties) and, since 2007, facilitates a counselling and psychotherapy service (*ibid.*, p. 16). The Dublin-based Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative (SPIRASI) 'provides a unique range of psycho-social, psychological, and advocacy services to torture-survivors' (*ibid.*, p. 23). The Spiritan mission to serve 'orphans, delinquents, refugees and the unemployed' (DEA 2006, p. 13), whilst clearly evidenced in, is not confined to, the aforementioned initiatives.



## **1.9 The Structure of the Study**

Chapter One introduced the study and set the background and context for the study. It presented the research question, outlined the purpose and rationale for the study, located the researcher within the study, introduced the research participants and outlined the underlying philosophical assumptions, scope and structure of the study.

Chapter Two conducts a review of literature pertinent to the research question. The literature review is divided into two parts. Part One explores integral service of the poor as constitutive of the espoused mission of the Catholic and Spiritan school. Part Two addresses the challenges facing fee charging Catholic and Spiritan schools in bearing witness to their espoused mission to serve the poor in an integral manner. Documentary analysis of Spiritan documentation is integrated into both parts of this literature review.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology employed in this study. The philosophical paradigms that underpin the study are explained. The rationale for selecting a qualitative approach to the research is presented. The choice of methodological tools/strategies of inquiry to gather data is described. This study is a case study. The selection of a case study research design is explained and justified. At the heart of this qualitative intrinsic micro-ethnographic case study is a ‘paradox’ (Whelan 2016). What McEvoy (2014) and Egan (2014) describe as the ‘uneasy tension’ surrounding this paradox creates a rich tapestry of opinion generated from the semi-structured interviews with principals and patron representative and from the parental survey questionnaire. Images of, the crystal as prism (Richardson 2000), ‘complex quilt-like bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 6) and montage capture the intricacies and richness that characterise the case.

The major themes and minor sub-themes that emerged from the findings are reported in Chapter Four. Chapter Five presents an interpretation of the findings pertinent to the research questions. Key themes arising from the study are outlined and presented as propositions under two main headings. Chapter Six concludes the study. Recommendations emerging from the findings of this study and suggestions for future research are presented in Chapter Six.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Catholic and Spiritan Fee charging Schools: Mission to Serve**

#### **A Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature pertaining to the mission of Catholic and Spiritan fee charging schools to serve, most especially, the poor. This review integrates themes derived from a documentary analysis of Spiritan literature (see Chapter 3.6.2.1). There were three distinct phases in the writing of this literature review. A philosophical literature review was undertaken in Year One of the study (phase 1), followed by an empirical literature review in Year Two (phase 2). A third review, integrating themes from phases 1 and 2 and addressing themes that emerged during data analysis, was undertaken in Year Four (phase 5). A third review was necessary, as the very significant Ethos Appraisal was only published in April 2015. For a full outline of the data collection and analysis timeline see Appendix F. In writing the final report of this case study, I adopted a thematic-based approach to the literature and integrated the themes from all three phases of this review process. It would be inaccurate to describe these phases as drafts because, although some themes overlapped in the phases, the development of further themes and the significant changes in emphases required me to ‘begin again’ for each of the three stages. The design of this literature review therefore bears the resemblance of:

... a well-used jig-saw puzzle ... Some parts are missing, some parts are intermixed and ultimately the task is to piece together as clear a view as possible of the overall picture, allowing for its complexity and the time available. This puzzle is approached thematically rather than systematically. The focus therefore is on the construction of the unique characters and the various background details of this particular picture rather than using a rubric that applies generally to any puzzle by outlining the boundaries and the corners, so to speak. (Machi and McEvoy 2009, p. 38)

The literature review is divided into two parts.

## **2.2 Part One: Integral Service of the Poor Constitutive of the Espoused Mission of the Catholic and Spiritan School**

Part One of this literature review reflects on the integral service of the poor constitutive of the espoused mission of the Catholic and Spiritan school. This section explores (i) the understanding of service in its integral as opposed to narrow sense (Dorr 2012, pp. 348–349), and (ii) an ‘option for the poor’ as constitutive of the mission of the Catholic church, the Catholic school and the Spiritan school. Reference to pre-conciliar, Vatican II, post-conciliar, national ecclesial and Spiritan documentation will be made, with particular attention to the works of Dorr (2012) and Collins (2012). Occasional reference will be made to the work of McVerry (2008, 2003), Grace (2002, 2013), Sullivan (2001) and Fahey (1998, 2007) amongst others.

### **2.2.1 Integral service**

As has been mentioned already, Dorr (2012) draws a distinction between narrow and integral service. Service understood in its narrow sense refers only to works of charity (e.g. fundraising, emergency relief). In its integral sense, however, service is inclusive both of works of charity and of a ‘prophetic challenge to injustice in the world’ (Dorr 2012, pp. 348–349).

#### **2.2.1.1 Pre-conciliar documents**

Commitment to service as part of the mission and mandate of the Catholic church is clearly evidenced in pre-conciliar ecclesial documents. Of particular, but not exclusive, significance in this regard are the works of Pope Leo XIII, Pope Pius XI and Pope John XXIII. *Rerum novarum* (Pope Leo XIII 1891), considered ‘the first of the great social encyclicals’ (Dorr 2012, p. 18) and the ‘*Magna Charta* of social and economic reconstruction’ (Pope John XXIII 1961, para. 26) ensured that social issues ‘could no longer be treated as marginal or secondary to the mission of the Church or as an “optional extra”’ (Dorr 2012, p. 20). In *Rerum novarum*, Pope Leo XIII reminds all Christians that:

[w]hoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and material, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time that he may employ them, as the steward of God's providence, for the benefit of others' (Pope Leo XIII 1891, para. 22).

Pope Leo XIII acknowledges Catholic schools as 'our greatest and best inheritance' and states that 'the future condition of the state depends upon the early training of its children' (Pope Leo XIII 1885, para. 4). Collins (2012, p. 70) claims that, in so doing, Pope Leo XIII is identifying 'a political and sociological value for the renewal of Catholic schools'.

According to Dorr (2012, p. 50), Pope Pius XI went a step further than Pope Leo XIII in advocating a 'structural analysis' of the causes of injustice and poverty in society. Pope Pius XI also recognised 'the supreme importance of Christian education ... [which is] essentially a social and not a mere individual activity for families and for the whole of human society' (Pope Pius XI 1929, para. 8–11). Pope John XXIII's understanding of the common good, for which all people have to work together, is the sum of 'all those social conditions which favour the full development of human personality' (Pope John XXIII 1961, para. 65).

Pre-conciliar ecclesial documents clearly suggest that service of others is constitutive of the mission of the Catholic church in general and of the Catholic school in particular. It could also be argued that the service advocated, though not consistently and explicitly stated, is integral in nature.

#### **2.2.1.2 The Second Vatican Council documents and beyond**

According to the document *Gravissimum educationis* (Vatican II 1965a, para. 1), 'a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.' Referring to this document, Collins (2012, pp. 72–73) states that it 'is quite explicit in the value the church places on the system of the Catholic school, and its mission for those in need' (Collins 2012, p. 72). Collins stresses the continuity between the basic claims made in this document and those of the Pre-Vatican II era, noting, however, that, in the Vatican II

documents, ‘the shades are lighter, the emphases not as didactic, and the tone more open’ (Collins 2012, p. 73). Sullivan (2001, p. 181) agrees, and emphasises the ‘much more positive’ language of the Second Vatican Council, which reflected a ‘new emphasis in the church’s stance toward the world’.

*Populorum progressio* (Pope Paul VI, 1967), which ‘analyses the global situation and sets out to explain why there is such an imbalance between the rich and poor countries ... represents a notable advance on earlier Church documents’ (Dorr 2012, p. 160). Pope Paul VI had a ‘consensus model of social change in mind’, which ‘gave special importance to those who now hold economic and political power; for they can easily block the crucial questions that need to be made [and to] those who mould the opinions of society – the educators, the journalists, and in general, those who are well educated and privileged’ (Dorr 2012, p. 174).

Whilst advocating integral service, the documents of the Second Vatican Council seem to advocate a top down model of structural change according to which those who have the power, as opposed to the powerless (i.e. the poor themselves), bring about change. It is also important to note that the structural changes envisaged come about ‘through negotiation and consensus rather than through violent revolution’ (Dorr 2012, p. 177).

The struggle for liberation and against structural injustice in Latin America is clearly evidenced in the Medellin documents (Conference of Latin American Bishops, 1968 cited in Dorr 2012). A church that is poor is according to these documents, obliged to denounce material poverty caused by injustice and demands that church leaders exercise a solidarity with the poor which requires ‘the redistribution of resources and personnel within the Church itself, so as to give effective preference to the poorest and most needy sectors’ (Dorr 2012, p. 181). Liberation theology advocates rigorous analysis and action to eradicate all forms of structural injustice.

*Justice in the World* (Synod of Bishops 1971) advocates that ‘a Church that presumes to speak to the world about justice must itself practice justice in its own life and structures’ (Dorr 2012, p. 218).

How deceptive it can be to imagine that poor people are the ones at the bottom of the ladder that everybody has the opportunity to climb ... the sad truth is that some nations or groups are poor not just because they have failed so far to climb the ladder, but because they have been prevented by others from doing so – or have even been thrown down the ladder’ (Dorr 2012, p. 186).

Pope John Paul II ‘encouraged the Latin American Church to continue to take a strong prophetic stance on questions of injustice’ (Dorr 2012, p. 261) and called for ‘a complete analysis to reveal unjust structures so that they may be examined and transformed to build a just earth’ (Healy and Reynolds 2007, p. 166 referring to Pope John Paul II 1981, para. 2). Destruction of these structures of sin ‘which impede the full realisation of those who are in any way oppressed by them’ and their replacement ‘with more authentic forms of living in community’ is a task ‘which demands courage and patience’ (Pope John Paul II, 1991). Referring to the credibility of the church in relation to matters of social justice (Pope John Paul II, 1991 para. 57) ‘actions speak louder than words’ (Dorr 2012, p. 314). In his encyclical *Sollicitudo reo socialis* Pope John Paul II (1987, para. 42) states:

It is necessary to state once more the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine: the goods of this world are originally meant for all. The right to private property is valid and necessary, but it does not nullify the value of this principle. Private property, in fact, is under a ‘social mortgage,’ which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of material goods.

According to Dorr (2012, p. 366), *Deus caritas est* (Pope Benedict XVI 2005) ‘offers a rich theology of charity or love’, but ‘holds that the promotion of justice is only an indirect duty of the Church’. Pope Benedict XVI seems to advocate a care/concern for the poor as opposed to a more radical option for the poor (Dorr 2012, p. 389).

Catholic social teaching is ‘not a fixed unchanging body of doctrine but a developmental understanding of the church’s social mission in a dynamically changing world’ (Clark 2007, pp. 19-20). The goal of Catholic social teaching is not ‘to dictate how individuals and society as a whole should carry out all their economic actions’. Instead it seeks ‘to help Christians and people of good will to make better

moral decisions ...[and] provide[s] an ethical foundation for global transformation’. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2005) presents a comprehensive overview of the key principles constitutive of Catholic social justice. Central to the vision of the church’s social teaching is the principle of the common good ‘to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning [and which] stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people’. (ibid., para. 164, p. 79). The principle of the universal destination of goods which recognises that ‘God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone’ (ibid., para.171, p. 82) is a call to solidarity (ibid, para 193, p. 93) and requires that ‘the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern’ (ibid., para.182, p. 86).

Pope Francis’ understanding of solidarity implies integral as opposed to narrow service (Pope Francis 2015, 2013) and echoes the ‘crucial and controversial’ (Dorr 2012, p. 215) claim that ‘action on behalf of justice is a “constitutive” dimension of the preaching of the gospel’ (Synod of Bishops 1971, intro para. 6), as evidenced in the following two quotations:

In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity. (Pope Francis 2015; para. 158)

The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. (Pope Francis 2013, para. 188)

### **2.2.1.3 National ecclesial documentation**

In *Vision 08*, the Irish Catholic Bishops (2008, p. 6) emphasise the mission of the Catholic school to serve, stating that, ‘understanding the demands of social justice and the common good, we [Catholic schools] also wish to function within the wider human community for which the Church exists and in which our pupils are called to live and serve with their God-given talents’.

Drawing on this document, the Catholic Schools Partnership *Position Paper* (2011, p. 5) articulated the following vision for Irish Catholic schools: ‘Catholic schools in Ireland ... emphasise the dignity of the human person as a child of God called to work with other persons in creating an inclusive community in service of the common good’. In *Share the Good News*, The Irish Episcopal Conference (2010, p. 55) identifies ‘service to neighbour, particularly the most poor and most vulnerable, the work of justice’ (in the context of *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI 2005), as a key characteristic in undertaking any examination of ‘catholicity.’ It also identifies the Catholic church ‘as the leaven in society, engaging in advocacy for those in need, pointing to the deficit that still exists between rich and poor’.

#### **2.2.1.4 Integral service constitutive of the Spiritan mission in education**

The nature of the ‘service’ that lies at the heart of Spiritan mission is service understood in its integral sense. ‘We count the following as constitutive parts of our mission of evangelisation: the “integral liberation” of people, action for justice and peace, and participation in development’ (SRL 14, cited in DEA 2015, p. 36). ‘To understand that the Catholic school is part of the church’s mission of evangelisation is central to understanding the founding congregational stories and the values embedded in them’ (Collins 2012, p. 68).

The Spiritan congregation, though not ‘founded specifically to engage in education’ has, as Rivard points out, ‘a long tradition of involvement in educational works’ (Rivard 2013, p. 7). Spiritan schools ‘were founded to inculcate Spiritan mission in an education context’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 4). Spiritan documentation clearly indicates that ‘Spiritans Schools, as participants in Spiritan mission are part of the great unfolding of God’s plan for the building together of a more just world where the rights and dignity of each person are of paramount importance’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 26). Chapter (2012) and the Ethos Appraisal (2015) situate the concept of service and the work of justice at the very heart of Spiritan identity and mission (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2012, p. 8; Ethos Committee 2015, p. 20).



Referring specifically to Spiritan mission in education, McEvoy (2014, p. 24) states that ‘a Spiritan learning environment is intended to inculcate in young people a commitment to just relationships with others and a willingness to give generous service to society, especially to the poor and dispossessed’. The Ethos Appraisal (2015, pp. 18–19) affirms this, stating that ‘Spiritan schools in Ireland understand that education is an effective means of bringing about a more just world through the pedagogical programme they offer’. All Spiritan schools support the work of SPIRASI (Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative) in Ireland and a number of Spiritan missions overseas (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 23).

### **2.2.2 Serving the poor: The heart of integral service and the mission of the Catholic School**

This thesis contends that bearing witness to an option for the poor lies at the heart of the Catholic and Spiritan mission of integral service. In order to establish this contention, an exploration of the mission of the Catholic and Spiritan school to serve, and most especially to serve, the poor, is required. This exploration will begin with a brief deconstruction of ‘poverty’ and of ‘the poor’.

#### **2.2.2.1 Who are ‘the poor’?**

Poverty is a complex and ‘multidimensional’ (McKendrick 2011) reality which can take many forms, e.g. ‘educational, spiritual, cultural and emotional’ (McKinney, Hill and Hania, 2013). This study addresses two broad categories of poverty, i.e. material and spiritual poverty. In relation to understanding material poverty in an Irish context brief reference will be made to educational poverty. The understanding of poverty employed in this study is rooted in a biblical understanding of the term ‘the poor’ (The Bible).

##### **(i) Material poverty**

We live in a world where 85 people share a combined wealth of 1.2 trillion euro -equal to that of the world’s poorest 3.5 billion people (Oxfam 2014).

Material poverty ‘addresses issues of unmet human needs’ (O’Boyle 2011, p. 110) - lack of food, clothing, health care, adequate housing and lack of resource to meet those needs (The European Anti-Poverty Network 2013). The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (Government of Ireland 1997) adopted the following definition of poverty:

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society.

At the heart of material poverty lies powerlessness and exclusion which blocks authentic human development and participation in the social, cultural and spiritual spheres of life (Clark 2007, p. 17). Poverty ‘prevents the poor from making contributions that benefit the common good’ (ibid.).

In relation to the ‘on-going poverty problem’ in Ireland, ‘*Poverty and Income Distribution Policy Briefing*’ (Social Justice Ireland 2014) reveals the following data:

Today there are more than 750,000 people living in poverty...16 per cent of adults living in poverty are employed – these are the working poor... The top ten per cent of households receives 24 per cent of total disposable income while the bottom ten per cent of households only receives 3 per cent. Almost one in five children live in households with incomes below the poverty line. Most weekly social assistance rates paid to single people are €14.21 below the poverty line... 220,411 children (18.8%) still live in poverty (proportion unchanged since last year) ... Since the crash the proportion of people in consistent poverty has risen by 83%. (4.2% of the population were in this situation in 2008 compared to 7.7% according to the new study).

Faced with this stark reality, and with the fact that ‘we are increasingly living in a world where the lowest tax rates, the best health and education and the opportunity to influence are being given not just to the rich but also their children’ (Clarken cited in Finn 2014), Social Justice Ireland (2014) suggests a number of proposals for action. Chief among them is the following:

If Government wishes to address and close these income divides future policy must prioritise those at the bottom of the income distribution. These policies must be designed to address the wide variety of households and adults in poverty.

In relation to material and educational poverty in an Irish context, students ‘whether living in poor families while completing their secondary education or while attending post-secondary education also have a high poverty rate at 29.5 per cent. (CORI 2008, p. 27) and ‘58 per cent of those in poverty are not connected to the labour market; they are people who are retired, students, people in caring roles or people who are ill or people with a disability’ (Social Justice Ireland 2014). It is also worth noting that in implementing the new JCSA (Junior Certificate Special Awards), ‘better-off schools can design and fund the new short courses much more easily, so it reinforces inequality’ (O’Brien 2013).

## **(ii) A biblical understanding of poverty**

In developing an understanding of ‘the poor’, the biblical concept of the poor will be explored. In this context particular reference will be made to Dorr (2012), Pope Francis (2015, 2013) and McVerry (2008).

The concepts of justice (right relationship) and poverty in the Old Testament are best understood when located within the context of the relationship (covenant) between God and God’s people (Israel). A distinctive feature of Israelite religion was ‘the interconnection between the relationship to one’s neighbour and to God established by the covenant’ (Barre 1996, p. 210). This relationship is characterised by the ‘inseparable’ (McKinney, Hill and Hania 2013, p. 5) and ‘indivisible’ (ibid., p. 6) bond between love of God and love of neighbour as presented in the commandments from Deuteronomy and Leviticus which state the following:

You shall love the Lord your god with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:5) ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Leviticus 19:18b)

The ‘quality’ of one’s relationship to God depended therefore ‘to some extent on how one related to fellow members of the covenant community’ (Barre 1996, p.210). At the time of the Old Testament prophet Amos, many among Israel’s wealthy and powerful people ‘had chosen to ignore this aspect of Israelite religion and ... oppressed the less fortunate’ (ibid., p. 210).

Yahweh's 'distress at the maltreatment of these people...forms the ultimate reason for Yahweh's decision to execute judgment on his people' (ibid, p. 210).

For trampling on the poor man and for extorting levies on his wheat: although you have built houses of dressed stone, you will not live in them, although you have planted pleasant vineyards, you will not drink wine from them...you oppressors of the upright who hold people to ransom and thrust the poor aside at the gates (Amos 5: 11-12)

In the three synoptic gospels, the two commandments (love of God and love of neighbour) 'are combined to sum up the Law' (McKinney, Hill and Hania 2013, p. 3). In Luke's gospel Jesus is 'upholder' of the Old Testament Law (Karris 1996, p. 676). Luke expands his view of who the children of Abraham and therefore heirs to God's promises are. In this 'reconstituted' Israel:

[t]he outcast class, women, play a prominent role [and] social status, ethnic heritage and religious self-justification do not qualify for membership in this exclusive group. The lame, blind and maimed now belong to this elect group as well as well-to-do Gentile Christians who share their possessions with those in need. (Karris 1996, p. 676)

In the context of Matthew's gospel, the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-11) could be described as 'the magna charta for the kingdom...with its ideals but also with its radical demands' (Fitzmyer 1981, p. 629). In the Beatitudes 'the poor are the first to be mentioned' (McKinney, Hill and Hania 2013, p. 2). Luke, (6.20: 'how blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours') praises God who has a 'special love for the unfortunate' (Karris 1996, p. 695). Jesus has come in 'an unexpected way' (Karris 1996, p. 676) to preach to the socially marginalised outcasts (Fitzmyer 1981, p. 629; Karris 1996, p. 676). McVerry describes Jesus' preferential treatment of the poor who were 'all despised, looked down upon, treated as second-class citizens, not wanted, kept at arms-length' (McVerry 2008, p. 17).

In his exploration of the biblical concept of 'the poor' Dorr (2012) states:

'The poor' refers especially to those groups of people who are economically deprived, who have no social status, who are treated unjustly by foreign rulers or by authorities in their own land. These people are poor because they are oppressed and are therefore at the mercy of the unscrupulous. Some groups of 'the poor' are doubly oppressed. They are the people who are oppressed because they are economically poor, but also because they happen to be widows, orphans or resident aliens – categories of people who have nobody to defend them against exploitation. (Dorr 2012, p. 12)

Dorr (2012) draws attention to those who are ‘doubly poor’ i.e. those who are economically disadvantaged and whose status renders them powerless. In addition to those who are materially poor and ‘doubly poor’ there are those who could be described as being spiritually poverty. ‘Those who are economically and politically poor may also be “poor in spirit,” dependant on God and open to God’ (Dorr 2012, p. 12). As they ‘are content with their present comfortable existence’, the rich and powerful, on the other hand ‘do not want to commit themselves to Jesus and the kingdom he effects’ (Karris 1996, p. 695) and therefore, ‘tend to rely on themselves and therefore close themselves off from God’ (Dorr 2012, p. 12). In this way material wealth can create a type of spiritual poverty. Those who ‘are strangers to the gift of Faith (Second Vatican Council 1965b, para. 9) and ‘do not know the beauty of faith’ (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, para. 15) could also be described as being spiritually poor.

Drumm (2008) seems to be referring to a much broader understanding behind the biblical concept of ‘the poor’ in the following statement: ‘When we look honestly at ourselves and those around us we discover that we are the sick, the deaf, the blind, the captive, the poor and not just in some abstract metaphorical sense but in the physical, psychological and spiritual realities of our lives’ (Drumm 2008, pp. 623–624). Sullivan (2001, p. 138) concurs and, in the light of Jesus’ ministry ‘to outsiders, the poor and the rejected’, extends his definition of poverty to ‘include those who are deviants, sinners, unorthodox, unpopular, unsuccessful, disabled, that is, the poor, interpreted broadly’. Whilst acknowledging that there is a sense in which ‘everybody is “poor before god”’ (Dorr 2012, p. 13) criticises church people who ‘see themselves as helping the spiritually poor when they educate the children of the rich ... and who see this work as sharing equal status with service of the materially poor’ (Dorr 2012, p. 270). He insightfully and incisively remarks that ‘the effect of this use of language is to deprive the notion of an “option for the poor” of any effective meaning, since everybody can be seen as poor in some respect’ (Dorr 2012, p. 270).

Pope Francis cites a variety of new forms of poverty and vulnerability – the homeless, those suffering from addiction, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who may feel isolated, migrants and victims of human trafficking (Pope Francis

2013, para. 210, 211). As they are frequently not in a position to defend their rights, women who endure exclusion, abuse and violence can be described as ‘doubly poor’ (ibid., para. 212). This resonates with the Spiritan understanding of the ‘new poor’, which includes ‘young people in difficulty, migrants, people who are discriminated against and oppressed, and those marginalised by the phenomenon of globalisation’ (Spiritan General Chapter 2012, Bagamoyo, Tanzania, 1.3., cited in DEA 2015, p. 41).

### **(iii) The concept of poverty employed in this study**

This study recognises the complex reality that is poverty and the fact that it can take many forms. While acknowledging that it is ‘not helpful to make too sharp a distinction’ between material and spiritual poverty (Dorr 2012, p.12) the understanding of poverty employed in this study may be understood in the following way. Material poverty relates to human needs and ‘is not a matter of unsatisfied human wants such as vacations and new cars’ (O’Boyle 2011, p. 110). An understanding of poverty as ‘exclusion’ which blocks the development of the person and his/her participation in the economic spheres of social (and cultural) life (Clark 2007, p. 17) lies at the heart of this study’s understanding of poverty. Those who are marginalised and treated as second-class citizens can be described as poor, but may be ‘doubly poor’ (i.e. they may experience exclusion and may also lack economic resources). Spiritual poverty is characterised by a lack of recognition of one’s dependency on, and need for, God. Those who are rich ‘may, of course turn to God; but so long as they remain attached to wealth and rely on their own power, it is almost impossible for them to be “poor in spirit”’ (Dorr 2012, p. 12). Those who have not heard the message of the gospel could also be described as being spiritually poor.

While clearly acknowledging that ‘there are many kinds of poverty’ (DEA 2015, p. 38), an option for the ‘most poor’ (of which some level of material poverty is constitutive) and which may be extended to include those who are ‘doubly poor’, lies at the heart of Spiritan mission. The understanding of ‘poverty’ and of ‘the poor’ employed in this study is consistent with the understanding of these concepts as outlined in church teaching and in Spiritan documentation. It is important to note that a definition of ‘poverty’ was not outlined to the participants in this study. This was to allow participants to interpret the concept in their own way.

#### 2.2.2.2 Option for the poor and the mission of the Catholic school

The term ‘option for the poor’ is understood as ‘a series of choices, personal or communal made by individuals, by communities or even by corporate entities such as a religious congregation ... to disentangle themselves from serving the interests of those at the “top” of society and to begin instead to come into solidarity with those at or near the bottom’ (Dorr 2012, p. 9). A crucial element in an option for the poor is, according to Dorr (2012, p. 269), ‘a commitment to ensure that one is not guilty of complicity in the impoverishment of vulnerable individuals, or groups, or whole countries’. Referring to the issue of ‘economic discipleship’, Horell challenges Christians ‘to recognis[e] how the buying practices of Christians and Christian faith communities often support the inequalities of the global economy and how the socio-economic divisions produced by global capitalism are often replicated, and hence reinforced, in Christian faith communities today’ (Horell 2003, p. 11). Christians and Christian faith communities engaged in the process of moral discernment, must weigh every option ‘in terms of how it resonates or fails to resonate with (their) sense of personal and social identity as Christians’ (ibid., p. 11).

An option for the poor reflects integral as opposed to narrow service. Dorr traces the development of the term option for the poor from its biblical origins but situates the roots of its contemporary usage in *Rerum novarum*. He argues that, while it would be an overstatement to see *Rerum novarum* as representing a complete vision of what is now meant by an option for the poor, it was intended to be a major intervention in defence of the poor in response to the church’s particular concern for the poor (Dorr 2012, pp. 11-45).

Referring to *Gaudium et spes* (Vatican II 1965b), Dorr (2012) states that this document:

[p]resents justice as central both to the issue of poverty and to that of peace. It calls for a change in the international economic structures; it stresses the right of the poor to their share of the Earth’s goods and insists that this imposes on the rich an obligation that is more than that of giving alms from their superfluous goods. (Dorr 2012, p. 153)

Dorr points out that, at Medellin in 1968, the Conference of Latin American Bishops ‘took the single most decisive step towards an “option for the poor”’ (Dorr 2012, p. 200). The Medellin documents emphasise that a poor church is committed to denouncing material poverty and promotes solidarity *with* the poor in the struggle against injustice (ibid., p. 181). Poverty is not therefore something that just happens; poverty is caused by human action that results in violence against huge masses of people (ibid., p. 180). The term ‘most especially or preferentially, the poor’ is used in *Octogesima adveniens* (Pope Paul VI 1971, para. 23). In emphasising this ‘preferential respect’, Pope Paul VI is supporting the stance adopted by the bishops at Medellin (Dorr 2012, p. 195). Despite the fact that it calls for ‘solidarity’ (Pope Paul VI 1971, para. 23), *Octogesima adveniens* fails, however, ‘to take sufficient account of the fact that in some situations, those who hold power have no intention of yielding it to the poor’ (Dorr 2012, p. 195). The teachings of Pope Francis (2015, 2013) state clearly and unequivocally where the primary focus of integral service is to be directed. Pope Francis calls for an option for the poor that recognises ‘the implications of the universal destination of the world’s goods’ (Pope Francis 2015, para. 158). A preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters is in fact ‘an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good’ (Pope Francis 2015, para. 158). He states, ‘I want a Church which is poor and for the poor ... The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed’ (Pope Francis 2013, para. 198, 202).

Ecclesial documents repeatedly emphasise the mission of the Catholic school to serve those in most need, i.e. the poor. *Gravissimum educationis* issued a challenge to all Catholics ‘to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfil their function in a continually more perfect way, and especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of Faith’ (Vatican II 1965a, para. 9). Referring to *Gravissimum educationis* (Vatican II 1965a, para. 9), *The Catholic School* (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1977, para. 58) states that, ‘first and foremost the Church offers its educational service to...the poor or those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith’.



Referring to *The Catholic School* (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1977), Collins states that this document ‘claims that the school is not just a medium for mission but that in itself is a witness to the church’s mission and its search for truth’ (Collins 2012, p. 74). In the document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1997, para. 15) points towards this ‘option for the poor’, stating that the ‘Catholic school ... is a school for all, with special attention to those who are weakest’. Students ‘who find themselves in greater difficulties, who are poorer, more fragile or needy, should not be seen as a burden or obstacle, but as the most important students, who should be at the center of schools’ attention and concerns’ (Congregation for Catholic Education 2014, para. 5).

#### **2.2.2.3 Option for the ‘most poor’: The raison d’être of Spiritan Mission in education**

From the very beginning, service of those most in need has been the *raison d’être* of the Spiritans. The Spiritans identify a willingness to serve in the most challenging and difficult situations and to serve those most in need as the preferred focus of the congregation’s mission (SRL 4, cited in Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012, p. 8). Education is an apostolate that furthers the spiritual and moral values of the kingdom of God and is an effective means of empowering the neediest people by working for justice and peace (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 18). Whilst acknowledging that the understanding of what constitutes “mission” ‘needs to be continuously re-evaluated in the context of lived experience and interpreted through the dual lenses of discernment and social analysis’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 4), the Spiritans still regard ‘a clear option for the most vulnerable and materially poor’ as *the* driving force in their current educational mission in Ireland (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2011). It is assumed that ‘a criterion for any [Spiritan] work to be undertaken is that the work and its effects must be seen from the perspective of the poor’ (Appendix I, DEA 2006, p. 19).

#### 2.2.2.4 Catholic and Spiritan schools: working *with* and *for* the poor?

Dorr asserts that there is a need for people to ‘work correctly *with*, not just *for*, the poor’ (Dorr 2012, p. 272), if one is to remain faithful to the mission of the church as expressed in ecclesial documentation. In a similar way, McVerry advocates a solidarity understood as ‘a radical commitment...to reach out to all in our world who are victims who are poor and who are marginalised, whether we like them or not’, a solidarity that ‘moves beyond compassion which may inspire good charitable acts’ (McVerry 2008, p. 83). He argues:

Our *compassion* for those who are homeless may bring us to donate generously to an appeal for funding ... but we may at the same time oppose the opening of a hostel for homeless people as being inappropriate for our neighbourhood. Our solidarity with those who are homeless, however, may compel us to support such a project, if it is in the interests of homeless people, despite the cost (real or imagined) to ourselves or to our property values ... Solidarity compels us to support policies in favour of the poor that may be detrimental to our own interests.

Both Dorr (2012) and McVerry (2008) advocate an integral and prophetic service of the poor through solidarity. This integral understanding of solidarity, which ‘goes beyond charitable sharing and engages in a radical restructuring of society’ (Sullivan 2000, p. 143), is also echoed in the words of Pope Francis (2013, para. 189), who states that ‘convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible’.

Work for ‘the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice and poverty’ (DEA 2011, pp. 6–7) is central to Spiritan core values. The Ethos Appraisal (2015) echoes this sentiment. It states that:

[a] Spiritan Spirituality of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation can form the inspiration for the development in Spiritan schools of a learning experience leading participants on pilgrimage into the world of the poor; challenging them to be present there in service, and to live lives in solidarity with people in need. (Ethos Committee 2015, pp. 18–19)

The model of service envisaged in the Spiritan documentation is one of the servant leader. Daly summarises Libermann’s understanding of the rule of conduct towards ‘those whom we seek to evangelise’ as that of ‘servant’ (Daly 1986, p. 195).

The missionary was ‘in a certain sense to overturn the social order by becoming himself the servant of the slaves’ (ibid., p. 196). Daly (1986) states:

A candidate for admission to the Holy Ghost seminary had to fulfil three conditions over and above the usual requirements: he had to be poor, he had to be willing to consecrate himself to the most difficult and abandoned works in god’s vineyard, and he had to be intelligent enough to follow successfully the strenuous programme of studies demanded by Father des Places (Daly 1986, p. 196).

Catholic schools and Spiritan schools face a serious challenge. They are called to embrace an integral service of the poor which promotes a radical solidarity with the poor and a commitment to struggle against all forms of injustice and oppression.

### **2.2.3 Catholic and Spiritan mission to serve the poor: some qualifications**

It is, however, important to draw attention to a number of qualifying remarks in relation to the preceding discussion and to the contention that integral service of the most poor is constitutive of the espoused mission of the Catholic school.

#### **2.2.3.1 The Catholic church and Catholic schools in Ireland: a limited history of social justice policy**

Sullivan (2001, p. 115) argues that between Vatican I and Vatican II the Catholic church adopted an inward looking and self-protective stance to the world. Keating (2006, p. 36) concurs, and observes that the church saw its role in education as ‘inward-looking, protectionist and defensive’. Dorr’s observation is that, prior to Vatican II, the general image of the church was that of a ‘socially conservative force giving ideological and quasi-political support to the status quo’ (Dorr 2012, p. 115). He draws attention to the fact that, ‘in reacting against a state monopoly in the area of education’, the church ‘almost by accident ... came to be allied with certain sectional interests’, while emphasising the fact that this was ‘neither its intention nor its ideal’ (ibid., p. 115).

In twentieth century Ireland, the Catholic church, through its provision of social services, sought to ‘disseminate and safeguard the faith, not to combat social inequality or reform society’ (Fahey 1998, p. 203; Fahey 2007). As a result, Catholic schools ‘reflected the existing social hierarchies within Irish society’ and schooling ‘was not viewed as a means of achieving greater social equality’ (Coolahan 1981, p. 55). Referring to this stratification and consolidation of social classes in Loreto schools in the 19th century, McDonald (2008, p. 183) states that ‘the provision of education for the children in the poor school seem[s] to be based on a sense of charitable duty rather than a desire to improve the situation ... the children were not encouraged to move beyond their station in life’.

McDonald’s view echoes Coolahan’s (1981, p. 55) observation that ‘the poor and the working classes were largely seen by leaders of church and state as a self-perpetuating sector of society for whom a limited education in literacy and numeracy was deemed sufficient’. Grace (2002, pp. 69–70) agrees with McDonald (2008) and Coolahan (1981) and draws attention to the very ‘real implications’ that the ‘limited pool of talent’ theories, dominant in Catholic schooling in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s, had in the UK, referring to the sense of outrage directed towards this system which seemed ‘to reproduce the contours of class and of intellectual advantage’. McCormack (2000, p. 152), however, disagrees, claiming instead that the clear purpose of schools set up for the poor was ‘empowerment so that the marginalised of one generation could, in the next generation, participate fully and meaningfully in developing Irish society’.

It is important to note that the promotion of the principles of Catholic social justice has not historically been a priority for Catholic schools. The nature of the service offered has been narrow as opposed to integral. Located within the context of a socially conservative church and state, which sought to maintain as opposed to challenge the status quo, the limited awareness and capacity of Catholic schools in operating a more integral policy of social justice is unsurprising.

### **2.2.3.2 A preferential but not exclusive option for the poor**

The church has the right ‘to establish and to conduct schools of every type and level’ (Vatican II 1965a, para. 8). Commenting on Pope John Paul II’s use of the controversial phrase, ‘a preferential but not exclusive option for the poor’, Dorr himself acknowledges that ‘the rich and powerful should not be entirely neglected or ignored’ and stresses that an option for the poor is by no means an option ‘against the rich’ (Dorr 2012, pp. 261, 272). Collins states that the gospel portrays Christ ‘serving both poor and rich, and making friends with all’ (Collins 2012, p. 89). *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, para. 5) states that, ‘the future of the world and of the church belongs to the younger generation’, rich and poor.

### **2.2.3.3 Integral service of the poor constitutive but deserving appropriate emphasis in the Catholic school**

Williams (2005, p. 109) reminds us that integral service of the poor is not exclusively the preserve of the Catholic school, (and by extension the Spiritan school). He states, ‘Catholic education does not have a monopoly over civic and moral virtue ... it is misguided to arrogate to Catholic schools alone concern with the welfare of others’. Likewise, Sullivan’s claim ‘is not a major one that Catholic schools contribute more than others to the common good, but the lesser one that they can be shown to contribute to this good in sufficiently numerous, diverse and significant ways’ (Sullivan 2001, p. 189).

Williams (2010, p. 177) also advises caution in overemphasising the social justice dimension of Catholic education, on the grounds that ‘commitment to the welfare of victims of poverty can turn into agenda driven consciousness-raising’. He offers some practical and sobering advice, namely that ‘Catholics who pronounce very attractive ideas about justice would need to be able to explain how these mesh with the taxation system.’

#### 2.2.4 Part One: concluding thoughts

Whether the difference in tone and emphasis, of pre-and post-conciliar documents relating to the mission of the Catholic church in general and of the Catholic school in particular to serve others, be subtle or stark, it might, as Collins (2012, p. 71) claims, ‘be argued that from 1929 (Pope Pius XI) to 2007 (Congregation for Catholic Education 2007), an explicit and formal institutional claim is being made that the Catholic school contributes to the common good to society’ (Collins 2012, p. 71). McBrien (2008, p. 251) makes a bolder claim, stating that, ‘from Leo XIII to the present ... the Church’s social teachings can be regarded as a constitutive part of its evangelising mission’.

Grace (2013, p. 89) contends that:

Charity as a concept and a practice had a long and honourable history in Catholic culture...Catholic schools and colleges are deeply involved in charitable giving to those in need in the wider world. Social justice, on the other hand, is a modern concept that only entered the formal discourse of the Catholic Church when it was first used by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) ... By the Second Vatican Council the commitment of the Church to working for social justice in the world had become more salient and active and this can be discerned in the education policy of the Church as expressed in the *Catholic School* [1977] document.

In reference to the operative mission of pre-Vatican II Catholic schools, Grace, remarks that:

The habitus of pre-Vatican II Catholic schooling...with particular reference to reflective accounts from Ireland and England...was constituted by a bedrock conception of the need for “works of charity” for those in unfortunate circumstances ... poor children, orphans and for the support of missionary activity, especially in Africa (Grace 2002, pp. 73–74).

Sullivan concurs with Grace (2013, 2002) and states that, while ‘the principles of justice, the option for the poor, respect for the dignity and freedom of the individual *must* be demonstrated within Catholic schools ... such demonstration has not always been apparent’ (Sullivan 2001, p. 187). Grace (2002, pp. 73–74) and Sullivan (2001, p. 187) both draw attention to the apparent inconsistency between the espoused and operative mission of Catholic schools with regard to serving the poor in an integral

manner. In relation to Spiritan schools in particular, findings indicate that while fundraising is ‘the most prevalent activity’ engaged in within second-level Spiritan schools, the manner of, and extent to which, this fundraising is ‘integrated into a more active and critical approach’ is unclear (Dillon 2013).

Mission is an organic reality that develops and evolves over time with different emphases at different points in history. Based on the preceding analysis of ecclesial and Spiritan documentation, it could be argued, and this thesis would support the claim that, although not exclusive to it, integral service of the most poor has been a constitutive dimension of the espoused mission of the Catholic school from pre-conciliar times, and of the Spiritan school from its beginning. The shades and emphases may change at various points in the telling of the story of these institutions, but the fact remains that, when it comes to the mission of a Catholic or Spiritan school, charitable acts, though essential and to be advocated and applauded, are, in and of themselves, insufficient in bearing witness to the gospel. Whilst one may acknowledge that, in carrying out their mission, religious congregations such as the Spiritans have a right to establish and run fee charging Catholic schools for the materially wealthy, these schools must promote solidarity *with* the poor, which involves both generosity in giving alms (diakonia in the narrow sense) but, which is also integrally linked to working for structural change in society.

Part Two of this literature review will now address the challenges facing Catholic and Spiritan fee charging schools in bearing witness to their espoused mission of integral service of the poor.

### **2.3 Part Two: The Challenges Facing Catholic and Spiritan Fee Charging Schools in their Service of the Poor**

In exploring the challenging interface between the espoused and operative mission of both Catholic and Spiritan fee charging schools to serve, and most especially to serve, the poor, the widely held and extensively documented perception of Catholic and Spiritan fee charging schools as ‘bastions of privilege’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 24) that serve the rich as opposed to the poor will be critiqued. The perception that these schools, by the nature of their socio-economic composition – characterised by a lack of diversity within and through their fee charging structures – serve the rich as

opposed to the poor, will also be explored. Findings from key reports and studies since the 1980s on the Irish context, which indicate the significant advantages (i.e. access to discretionary income, enhanced academic outcomes at second-level and high rates of progression to higher education) afforded to students from a high socio-economic background as characteristic of fee charging schools, will be presented in a study-by-study review (DES 2013; Byrne, McCoy and Watson 2007; McCoy, Kelly and Watson 2006; OECD 2012; Borooah, Dineen and Lynch 2010; Smyth 2009; Smyth and McCoy 2009; O'Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006; Lynch 2001;1988; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998). Particular attention will be paid to the work of Lynch and Lodge (2002), which presents a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the educational advantages afforded to students who attend second-level fee charging schools.

While it is evident that the vast majority of students who attend fee charging schools are from a high socio-economic background and enjoy many advantages, it is important to note that this study is not making the claim that these advantages are exclusive to fee charging schools. Many students from middle class families and high socio-economic background who do not attend fee charging schools also enjoy advantages. This study would, however, argue that fee charging schools offer more advantages than their non-fee charging equivalent.

### **2.3.1 Addressing the 'paradox': serving the rich as opposed to the poor?**

The church clearly states that the Catholic School is to be a school for all, stating that:

Since education is an important means of improving the social and economic condition of the individual and of peoples, if the Catholic school were to turn its attention exclusively or predominantly to those from the wealthier social classes, it could be contributing towards maintaining their privileged position, and could thereby continue to favour a society which is unjust. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1977, para. 58)

The gospel message cannot be 'reserved to a small group of the initiated, the privileged or the elect but is destined for everyone' (Irish Episcopal Council 2010, p. 47).



Sullivan reminds us that:

Any attempt to make schools operate as independent ‘islands’ undermines cooperation, community and co-responsibility for the common good. It encourages the use of education as a positional good for the benefit of an elite, rather than as transformational of personal experience and as constitutive of the good life to be shared in common. (Sullivan 2001, p. 140)

It could be argued that anyone has the right to attend a fee charging school, provided they have the money. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that, ‘schools can *accept* all pupils, but they may not *welcome* them all in the same way’ (Tuohy 2006, p. 37).

In reflecting on equality in education, Lynch (2001, p. 401) remarks that equality of opportunity ‘fails to resource these [disadvantaged] students to avail of this on equal terms with others’, and in consequence, ‘what has been achieved in education is a minimalist type of equality of access, but not equality of participation, and certainly not equality of outcome’.

It is important to note that ‘all schools operate in a particular social and political context’ (Keating 2006, p. 20). Historically, the majority of Catholic schools were established in response to ‘the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged’, as is evident in, among others, the work of the Ursuline nuns, the De la Salle and Don Bosco in this area (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, para. 15). However, this is not universally the case. In many contexts, religious congregations were requested by local bishops to establish schools in more affluent areas to serve the needs of an emerging middle class. The CPMSA (2011, para. 6.01) notes, however, that ‘it is important that no one form of patronage is viewed as either elitist or ghettoised’, and Tuohy issues caution to Catholic patrons by reminding them that:

Our stewardship of schools follows another great archetype from scripture – the servant leader. However the service we offer is not that of slaves, but of healing and reconciliation. Undoubtedly at this time we will be tempted to different types of stewardship ... there would be advantages in having control over things and resources. However, we must see that for what it is – a temptation. (Tuohy 2006, p. 45)

In relation to Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools, the Spiritan provincial referred to this 'fault-line' (McEvoy 2014, p. 12) as 'not necessarily a contradiction but certainly a paradox' (Whelan 2016). Ryan (2008, p. 28) is more critical of religious bodies who, in spite of their dwindling numbers, retain a strong presence in almost all of the country's most 'prestigious' schools, stating that 'people will go without the Eucharist, it appears, long before the rich and powerful go without the comfort of expensive elitist religious-run fee-paying schools'. There is a perception that Spiritans are perpetuating educational elitism and 'working to a class agenda' (Lynch and Moran 2006, p. 225) through maintaining a strong presence among the wealthy in society.

Collins (2012) states that her thesis 'recognises and respects the discourse about Catholic schools serving the poor and rich as contextual, challenging and continuing' (Collins 2012, p. 91). Contradiction, paradox, dilemma, hypocrisy; a pluralism of perspectives circle this thorny and contentious issue, reminding us that 'the world is not black, white or gray. Rather, it is a rich tapestry with many shades of colors' (Horell 2010, p. 1).

The apparent contradiction, or at the very least paradox, raises some very challenging questions for fee charging Catholic and Spiritan schools. Chief among them are the following: how can fee charging Catholic and Spiritan schools express solidarity *with* the poor within their school walls when they lack social diversity? Do the socio-economic composition and fee charging structures of these schools and the perceived advantages they confer adversely affect or enhance the efforts of Catholic and Spiritan schools to bear witness to their mission of integral service of the poor? Catholic fee charging schools and more specifically Spiritan fee charging schools are continually seeking creative ways to address these challenges as evidenced in the following discourse.

### **2.3.2 The issue of social diversity**

In exploring the perceived lack of diversity within fee charging schools this literature review will focus solely on the issue of social diversity in economic terms. An in-depth analysis of other types of diversity, and most notably the inclusion, or lack thereof, of students with special needs etc., will not be addressed.

### 2.3.2.1 Serving a diversity *of* schools

In the context of the recent reconfiguration of patronage structures (The Forum Advisory Group 2012; Collins 2012), religious orders involved in fee charging schools are re-evaluating the extent and nature of their future involvement in education. In an effort to avoid running the risk of ‘becoming over-associated with the better-off classes that they are now catering for’ (Norman 2003, p. 96), some are considering the location of their schools today and are seeking out new areas where the need is greater. Dorr concurs, stating that ‘more recently an increasing number of committed Church people ... choose to challenge the rich by transferring their energies to working with the poor’ (Dorr 2012, p. 272). The key directive in this discourse is that ‘when choices have to be made the poor become the chosen ones’ (Collins 2012, p. 90). This directive was reflected in a recent choice made by the Le Chéile Catholic schools trust to apply for trusteeship of a Catholic secondary school in Mulhuddart in north-west Dublin. The chosen area was ‘one of social and economic challenges and also an area in which there is no Catholic secondary school’ (ibid., p. 90).

In keeping with their Spiritan Rule of Life 4, which identifies service of those most need as the preferred focus of the congregation’s mission, and in line with their commitment to education in Ireland, (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012, p. 13) the Spiritans are exploring the possibility of tendering for the patronage of schools built in new urban areas and especially those areas that are most disadvantaged. If the Spiritans were to subscribe to Lynch’s claim that, ‘if we are to educate for diversity and with diversity, we cannot be selective about the identities we respect and recognise’ (2001, p. 403) then, as honourable as their intentions in serving a greater diversity of schools may be, they would still fall short in promoting diversity within the fee charging structure itself and would fail to offer service in its integral sense. Diversity *of* schools is undoubtedly an important development, but in striving to embrace integral service, the more challenging issue of diversity *within* schools needs to be addressed. As Lynch states, ‘if the socio-cultural dimension of the equality framework has to be taken seriously, then there is a need to educate *with* and *for* all forms of cultural and social diversity’ (Lynch 2001, p. 403).

### **2.3.2.2 Serving diversity *within* fee charging schools**

In penetrating the inside life and culture of schools, in classrooms, corridors, staffrooms and in recreational spaces, the extensive mixed method study undertaken by Lynch and Lodge (2002) provides an in-depth exploration, of the relative educational advantage of attending schools with a predominantly middle to upper class socio-economic composition and, of the role these schools play in the equality 'game' (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 21). The findings of Lynch and Lodge indicate a three-tiered system in operation in the Irish education system; the upper middle classes (inclusive of large farmers) send their children to fee charging schools, less well-off middle class families send their children to secondary schools, and working class families send their children to community colleges.

Whilst acknowledging the wonderful benefits her son who attends a fee charging school receives (low class size and more subject choices etc.), White (2012) identifies absence of diversity as 'a profound loss', remarking that 'we look around us at school events and see no-one any different from ourselves. No-one who isn't Irish. No-one who's not middle-class'. Lynch (2001, p. 403) draws attention to the challenge posed to educators today to educate for diversity and with diversity, and observes that traditionally such diversity has been dealt with by segregation. Williams (2005, p. 29) advocates the need to educate with diversity, stating that 'educating children from diverse backgrounds in the same school can be expected to enlarge their understanding of views which differ from theirs. This enlarged understanding may lead to deeper sympathy with individuals who hold these views and this should lead to increased respect for, and tolerance of, others'. In raising the question, 'how do we communicate and give young people the example of inclusion and respect for others if we do not include them and respect them within the community we call school?' McVerry (2003, p. 234) concurs with Williams (2005). McVerry (2003, p. 233) states:

I wonder if there is not a contradiction in terms of giving young people a respect and reverence for the 'other' when some of those who are 'other' are excluded from participating in the community of their school. When those who are 'other' are excluded ... how do we communicate and give young people the example and inclusion or respect for others if we do not include them and respect them in the community we call school?

The 1988 Spiritan Chapter meeting called for ‘an on-going evaluation of the type of education provided in [our] schools, in accordance with the criteria for the Spiritan mission’ (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2011), and the 1994 Spiritan Chapter posed a challenge to Spiritan schools to ‘explore the possibility of admitting or helping disadvantaged students’ (ibid., 2011). Whilst it is within the powers of the DEA to ‘grant educational scholarships, exhibitions, prizes and awards’ (Memorandum of Association of des Places Education Association Article 1(b) 8, p. 2) no official DEA-sponsored bursary/scholarship system to enhance diversity within Spiritan fee charging schools is currently in place. Referring to the commitment of the Spiritan congregation to increasing diversity through access (Whelan 2016; Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012, p. 13), the Ethos Appraisal (2015) and the Mission Audit (2014) refer to implementing changes in regard to the social structure of Spiritan schools through adopting bursaries and/or scholarships. The provincial recently affirmed the congregation’s commitment to increasing social diversity in Spiritan schools. He stated:

Spiritan education is not just about educating Christians or education for Catholics. You all know that. Diversity has to be part of our educational offering. We have talked about inclusivity in our schools and changing the fee paying status. The latter is not feasible but the intention around opening up access remains’ (Whelan 2016).

### **2.3.2.3 Historical division *among* and *within* religious congregations**

According to Lynch and Lodge (2002, p. 46) ‘most religious-run schools, are social class stratified among themselves’. Keating (2006, p. 63) concurs, noting that ‘the Jesuits and Holy Ghost Fathers had provided a more exclusive grammar school education, mainly for upper middle class boys’. Fahey (2007, p. 148) agrees, and identifies how ‘those congregations most associated with populist provision, such as the Sisters of Mercy and the Irish Christian Brothers, eventually found themselves oriented more to the lower middle classes than to those at the very bottom of the social scale.’

McDonald (2008, p. 190) highlights the social class stratification *within* the Loreto Order itself, referring to the distinction between ‘Choir Sisters’ who taught in schools and ‘Lay Sisters’ who performed the domestic duties that enabled the school and convent to function. Disturbingly, the segregation was ‘physical, social and accepted as the norm not just by the community but by the pupils’ (McDonald 2008, p. 191).

Not all authors share the benign view that the identification of religious orders with social class divisions was unintentional. Fahey (1998, p. 204) references the instrumental role played by the Church in shaping the Vocational Education Act (1930) in order to protect ‘the social standing and exclusiveness of Catholic academic secondary schools [and] thereby inflicting a status inferiority on vocational schools which blighted their development over succeeding decades’. Tuohy (2008, p. 130) also refers to this historical ‘creaming off’ by the Catholic voluntary sector.

In the light of the preceding discussion, Catholic fee charging schools that seek to address structural inequalities by offering scholarships to economically disadvantaged students need to exercise caution in determining the grounds on which these scholarships are offered. Selecting on the basis of academic or sporting achievement alone could reinforce inequality and place the schools from which the students have been removed at a greater disadvantage.

#### **2.3.2.4 The perceived advantages of the socio-economic composition characteristic of fee charging schools: a study-by-study empirical review**

The question arises, does the socio-economic composition characteristic of fee charging schools confer advantages on students who attend these schools and contribute to educational inequality? Findings from the following studies reveal that school composition impacts significantly in terms of academic and non-academic outcomes and highlight the significant advantage of attending schools whose student cohort is from a high socio-economic background, as is characteristic of fee charging schools.

The *Co-Education and Gender Equality* study (Hannan et al. 1996), which examined a range of factors (including socio-economic background, school choice, etc.) that could explain differences between co-educational and single-sex schools found that, in terms of school composition, secondary schools tend to be more middle class and vocational schools more working class in terms of pupil composition, and that less able students are more heavily concentrated in vocational and community/comprehensive schools. Results from this study also indicated that, controlling for other factors, students from a higher professional background score just over one grade point better than their counterparts from an unskilled manual background at Junior Certificate level; at Leaving Certificate the corresponding figure is just over two grades. Results also indicated that ‘over half of the difference in average performance between schools is a result of the differing social backgrounds of their pupils’ (ibid., p. 126). Results indicated that ‘pupils who expect to achieve in exams have more positive body-images, reflecting an underlying sense of global self-esteem’ (ibid., p. 172).

Critical of the fact that international studies tend to view school effectiveness in terms of pupil achievement alone and fail to provide specific guidelines relating to the manner in which more nebulous factors (such as school ethos) can be assessed, the study *Do Schools differ?. Academic and Personal Development among Pupils in the second-level sector* (Smyth 1999) concentrated on the impact schools have on a range of pupil outcomes. Smyth identified school context, school management and staffing, school organisation and class allocation, school climate and teacher effectiveness as factors that influence school effectiveness. Confirming the findings of the Hannan et al. study (1996), results from Smyth’s (1999) multi-dimensional investigation of the complex of factors (relating to school organisation and process) characteristic of more and less effective schools, indicated that, even controlling for social background and ability, pupils in middle class schools tend to have higher exam scores than those in working class schools. Findings suggest that much of the difference between second-level schools in relation to pupil outcomes (both academic and non-academic) is, in fact, due to differences in school composition. Findings also indicated that middle class pupils tend to do better in exams in part because they have better attendance, are more likely to stay on in school, and have more positive self-images. The opposite is true of working class pupils and pupils in

working class schools. The Lynch and Lodge (2002) study found that middle-class students, are least likely to be in low streams or bands within streamed schools, have increased on-task class time and experience lowest discipline issues and disruption in comparison to their working class peers.

The 2007 ESRI *School Leavers Survey* indicated that higher rates of part-time jobs are associated with young people from manual/non-manual or unemployed socio-economic backgrounds. Results also suggested that one overriding factor influencing the decision to leave school early was economic or work factors. Drawing on the findings of the ESRI's *School Leavers Surveys* (2006 and 2007), the study of Smyth and McCoy (2009) *Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage*, found that over 90% of young people with a parent/parents in professional occupations complete the Leaving Certificate, compared with two-thirds of those from unskilled manual backgrounds. Results also indicated that, whereas 58% of students from higher professional backgrounds achieved four or more 'honours' grades in the Leaving Certificate, only 16% of those from semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds achieved this.

The OECD Report (2012) *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, based on findings from PISA (2009), indicated that, in Ireland, students from low socio-economic backgrounds are 2.40 times more likely to be low performers than students from high socio-economic backgrounds (this is slightly above the OECD average of 2.37). Results suggested significant differences in the performance of students between schools, due in part to student socio-economic background. Since they fail to reduce the negative impact of disadvantaged background on students' educational attainment, disadvantaged schools tend to reinforce students' socio-economic inequalities. Results also indicated that Irish schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students are at greater odds of being affected by social and economic problems that can inhibit their learning.

Participation in higher education in Ireland is high (and is steadily increasing) by European standards. Nevertheless, 'despite the abolition of third-level tuition fees in 1996, social inequality in access was greater in 1998 than at the beginning of the 1980s' (O'Connell, McCoy and Clancy 2006, p. 312). The study by O'Connell,



McCoy and Clancy (2006), *Who went to college? Socio-economic inequality in entry to higher education in the Republic of Ireland in 2004*, examined the trends in social class inequalities in relation to access to higher education in Ireland between the mid-1990s and 2004. Two principal data sets, namely a combination of the results of a series of *School Leavers Surveys* from the mid-1990s and early 2000s, and a survey of new entrants to higher education in 2004, were employed. In addition to this, administrative data collected from HEIs and analyses of the 2002 Census were used. Analyses based on the combined results for four *School Leavers Surveys* for 1998, 1999, 2002 and 2004 were employed. In terms of progression to higher education, results indicated an increase in young people from lower social class backgrounds; these were most notably the children of manual workers. However, results also indicated an over-representation of school leavers from professional backgrounds among those progressing to higher education and an under-representation of school leavers from skilled manual and especially from semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds. While over a quarter of school leavers progressing to higher education were from higher professional backgrounds, less than 19% of all school leavers were from such backgrounds. A comparison of the results of the 2002 and 2004 surveys with the results of the 1997 and 1998 surveys indicated that students from professional backgrounds persistently account for a higher share of entrants to higher education than their share of all leavers.

### **2.3.3 The charging of fees: a study-by-study empirical review**

The question arises as to whether any Catholic fee charging school, which by its very structure excludes those who cannot afford to pay, can bear witness to the espoused mission to offer integral service and to opt for the poor. In this regard, Lynch states that '[s]chools themselves are not neutral actors in the perpetuation of class inequality. Many schools position themselves to attract the most educationally attractive students through a host of mechanisms that are clearly class biased. Most obviously schools that charge fees (with some minor exceptions) exclude all those who cannot pay' (Lynch 2001, p. 399).

McVerry (2003) concurs with Lynch (2001). He states:

Fee-paying schools are not the most important issue in our education system – only a tiny proportion of children attend fee-paying schools. Yet they are symbolic of the inequality that exists within the education system. They are where parents can use their wealth to guarantee privileged access and opportunities for their children. If we seriously wanted a fair and a just and an equitable educational system we would struggle for the abolition of such opportunities in fee-paying schools. If we were to struggle for that, where would the opposition come from? The opposition would come from the parents, the parents who were taught as children in our Catholic education system. (McVerry 2003, p. 233)

According to an analysis of 730 schools from across the country whose students completed the leaving certificate examinations between 2009 and 2015, ‘60pc of students who sat their leaving certificate at fee charging schools went on to study at a university, compared to 35pc of those who completed their education at a non-fee-paying school’ (Quinlan 2016). The following study-by-study empirical review examines the impact of the charging of fees on educational outcomes and access to higher education.

### **2.3.3.1 Lack of economic, educational, social or cultural barriers to higher education**

Informed by emancipatory research principles, the study *Inequality in higher education: a study of class barriers* by Lynch and O’Riordan (1998) sought to identify strategies to improve working class rates of participation (which, by national standards, were low) in higher education. Data from intensive interviews undertaken with 122 people purposively selected from a range of counties, schools and higher institutions in Ireland were thematically analysed. Economic barriers were identified as the most significant obstacle to equality of access and participation for low income working class students. Findings indicated that disadvantaged students lacked adequate resources (e.g. a place to study) and did not have the finances to buy the extra resources (grinds, education trips, computers, reading material, etc.) to achieve the points necessary to gain entry to higher education. Results revealed that just under half of the disadvantaged second-level students worked part-time (they did not regard work as optional), 40% had considered leaving school due primarily to financial stress, and supplementing the family income meant less time for study.

Findings indicated that, for participants in fee charging schools, money was not a consideration in the decision to go to college. In addition to economic barriers, findings identified social and cultural barriers to access. Whereas over one-third of the disadvantaged students in higher education felt like outsiders (due to their class origins), middle class students did not share this experience. Unlike a significant percentage of the disadvantaged cohort, all second-level fee charging students were fully cognisant of the application process for college and of the repeat options available to them. Findings also indicated an ‘acceptance’ of inequality and an internalisation of the meritocratic ideology. Criticism of class-related inequality was directed at the state (as the referee between the classes) and not at the class system itself.

#### **2.3.3.2 Fees: superior resources, additional teachers and extra co-curricular activities**

The Lynch and Lodge (2002) study outlined the role that schools play in the equality ‘game’ (ibid., p. 21). Findings from this study indicated that, despite its constant presence, only 4% of all student essays identified social class inequality as a problem within school life and those who did identify it were not predominately working class students. Whilst there was a reluctance among working class students to claim working class status, those attending fee charging schools demonstrated great confidence in naming and claiming their own social class. These students recognised that fee charging schools were a mechanism to maintain their class advantage and accepted, and in some cases welcomed, the privileges a fee charging education offered.

This study also found that, while fee charging schools receive state funding (via teachers’ salaries), the fees they are allowed to charge result in major differences in relation to additional teachers, extra-curricular activities and sports facilities, etc. The extra financial support received by designated disadvantaged schools was not, according to the findings of this study, ‘remotely comparable to the income fee-paying schools command directly from parents’ (ibid., p. 42). In addition to this, findings suggested that extra-curricular activities also have a role to play in projecting the social class identity of the school. Findings indicated that a lack of

resources (e.g. money, transport, and at times knowledge) preclude low income families from selecting exclusive schools and that, through fees, costly uniforms and the type of extra-curricular activities available, fee charging schools 'position themselves to attract the most educationally attractive students' (ibid., p. 62).

Findings from the Lynch and Lodge (2002) study confirm the findings of an earlier study, *Reproduction in Education: An Elaboration of Current Neo-Marxist Models of Analysis* (Lynch 1988). The organisational life and procedures of a stratified random sample of 90 second-level schools (out of a population of 816) were examined in this study through detailed interviews with the school principals, visits to the schools and analysis of school publications (e.g. reports, prospectuses, etc.). The study included a sample of eight fee charging schools. The provision of extra-curricular resources in the Arts and Sports, which constitute two 'particularistic' (i.e. outside state control) areas of school life across school types was investigated in this study. Results indicated that, when examining the extracurricular provision for aesthetic interests (arts and craft, debating, photography, film society, etc.), students (boys in particular) in fee charging secondary schools 'were exposed to much more aesthetically-oriented extracurricular experiences' (ibid., p. 160) than their peers in all other school types. Results also highlighted the 'gross inequalities' (ibid., p. 160) that exist between fee charging and non-fee charging schools in relation to availability of fields for games. As the fee charging schools included in the sample were (on average) no bigger than the other school types, 'this superior provision, was not a function of school size' (ibid., p. 160).

According to the Ethos Appraisal (2015), all Spiritan schools provide 'wide academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular educational experiences to engage each student in what interests them' (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 25), as evidenced in the range of activities provided for in one fee charging Spiritan college:

Sporting activities (from Athletics to Water Polo) and Music appreciation in a school with four choirs, an orchestra and a whole range of individual talent taking to the stage in the Leman Concert held each year in the National Concert Hall. The Performing Arts and Debating have a high profile in the school and students achieve to a high standard. (DEA 2015, p. 64)

### 2.3.3.3 Private tuition outside the schooling system

‘Shadow education’ (i.e. paid private tuition) is on the increase both nationally and internationally. While international studies suggest that such tuition can improve academic performance and facilitate access to higher education, these studies rarely take into account significant differences between those taking private tuition and other students. In the study, *Buying your way into college? Private tuition and the transition to higher education in Ireland*, Smyth (2009) investigated the characteristics (socio-economic background, parental education, location – rural or urban) of students availing of private tuition and the impact of such tuition on academic outcomes in Ireland. This study employed two data sources: the *School Leavers Survey* of 2004 and the *Schools Database* of 1994. The *Schools Database* 1994 is based on a national survey of 4,813 Leaving Certificate students (who are in their final year) in 108 secondary schools. It includes detailed measures of prior achievement, educational attitudes and aspirations, investment in schoolwork and take-up of private tuition. Data from both sources are nationally representative. Leaving certificate examination grades (based on official records) were subsequently matched to the survey data. Both data sources were analysed separately and multivariate modelling techniques were employed to assess the net impact of private tuition on student outcomes.

Results from the Smyth (2009) study indicated a significant rise in the numbers of students availing of paid tuition in their last year of school. In relation to social class, participation in private tuition is highest among the higher professional group and lowest among those from working class backgrounds. Take-up of private tuition is highest among those attending fee charging schools, which indicates ‘that certain groups of parents are using more than one form of market-based education simultaneously’ (Smyth 2009, p. 10), and lowest among students attending vocational schools, which have a high concentration of working class students. The higher participation found within fee charging schools reflects the social class and educational backgrounds of students attending these schools, with no significant school-type effect found when these factors are taken into account. Results indicated that those taking private tuition are almost three times as likely as other students to enter higher education.

In their study, *Which are the 'best' feeder schools in Ireland? Analysing school performance using student third level destination data*, Borooah, Dineen and Lynch (2010) investigated three broad factors (school type, school location and county level socio-economic characteristics) that underpin the success of three types of second-level schools (public non-fee charging English language; fee charging English language; and Gaelscoil non-fee charging Irish language) in terms of the proportion of their students ('sits') who progress to third-level education and the 'quality' of their educational destinations. Data relating to school address, location, type, numbers progressing to third-level, etc. for each of the 710 schools were derived from The Irish Times feeder school tables. Information on the Gaelscoileanna was accessed from the DES website. Data with information on the socio-economic context of the school was obtained from the 2006 Census. Each school was associated with a number of county-specific variables, e.g. occupational class, level of education attained, etc. Two measures were used to calculate school performance: PR – the proportion of its sits, expressed as a percentage, proceeding to third-level education, irrespective of institutional destination; and WPRI – the weighted proportion index of a school (three points were assigned to a student attending TCD or UCD, two points for attendance of another university; and one point for a non-university institution). Results indicated a variety of factors that contributed positively to school performance, but the best combination of school characteristics was a large fee charging school in 'elite' Dublin. Such schools added, on average, 36.18 points to PR and 38.96 points to WPRI.

According to the latest Irish Times figures, social class remains a key factor in the performance of schools, especially in the capital. Students in more affluent areas in Dublin are progressing to college at a rate of up to four times those in disadvantaged areas. 'The social class divide is most obvious in the feeder school list for high points courses in universities and other third-level institutions' (O'Brien and Falvey 2015).

#### **2.3.3.4 Fee Charging Schools Analysis of Fee Income Report (DES 2013)**

The main objective of the Department of Education and Skills *Fee Charging Schools Analysis of Fee Income Report* (2013) was to establish the funding position of the 55 fee charging schools relative to schools of equivalent enrolments that are non-fee charging. This analysis was conducted within the larger context of budgetary cuts

and changes in the PTR (pupil-teacher ratio) of fee charging schools. The Department wrote to each of the 55 fee charging schools requesting details of fees charged per student for the academic year 2011–2012. All 55 schools responded. Participation, though not mandatory, was incentivised by the fact that, in cases where schools chose not to provide information, the Department proposed to depend on its own calculations of gross income. Information, in relation to other income sources for fee charging schools, e.g. investments, tax refunds and endowments, was not sought. Schools were invited ‘to submit any information of liabilities’, e.g. reduced fees for siblings ‘that reduced the gross estimate of discretionary income’ (ibid., p. 11). Schools were grouped into categories and data were aggregated to ensure that no individual school would be identifiable on publication of the Report.

Results indicated that 55 fee charging schools currently have €81.3 million available to them, above that which is available to similarly-sized non-fee charging schools. The average amount of discretionary income available per school is €1.48 million each. This funding allows them to privately recruit additional subject teachers and extra ancillary staff or invest in capital improvements and extracurricular activities’ (DES 2013, p. 3). Results indicated a substantial disparity between schools in the fee charging sector, with discretionary income ranging from €112,000 for one small school to €4.7 million for a large school. This disparity reflects variation in the level of fees among schools and in the number of students paying fees. Fees charged ranged from €2,550 to €10,065. Nine schools charge in excess of €6,000 per annum and have on average €2.2 million in discretionary income (ranging from €1.08 million to €4.7 million) and seven schools charging a fee between €2,500 and €3,000 have on average €696k in discretionary income (ranging from €326k to €1.4 million).

A systematic analysis of educational governance and financing across the three different sectors (voluntary secondary, vocational, and community/comprehensive) of second-level schools in Ireland was undertaken in *Governance and Funding of Second-Level Schools in Ireland* (ESRI 2013). Findings from this report indicated a lack of transparency in relation to the funding of the three sectors, and identified a substantial gap (30%) in funding between faith-based (voluntary secondary) and state schools. Data from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders (parents, students

and teachers) and a nationally representative survey of principals and BOM chairpersons were collected and analysed over an 18 month period. The fact that the three school sectors are funded through different mechanisms made comparisons, (on a like-with-like basis) in relation to school funding, difficult. Results, however, suggest that faith-based schools are more reliant than other school type on sources of income such as fundraising or parental voluntary contributions, which puts them at a disadvantage. Findings also indicated that, whereas the trusteeship function is indirectly funded by the government in the case of vocational and community comprehensive schools, in the case of voluntary secondary schools this function is paid for by school trusts and religious orders. Given the significant decline in religious personnel, ESRI (2013) recommends a review of the voluntary secondary funding trusteeship function.

With the advantages of attending fee charging schools clearly in evidence and the fact that these schools cater for a certain socio-economic group characterised by a degree of material affluence, a number of significant questions arise. Chief among them are the following: Are there other types of poverty that fee charging schools are addressing? Though lacking social diversity within their walls, are fee charging schools serving the poor in other ways? It is to these questions that this study now turns its attention.

#### **2.3.4. Catholic and Spiritan schools: serving a different type of poverty?**

While it is evident that material poverty is generally not characteristic of the student body attending fee charging schools, the argument that these schools serve a different type of poverty needs to be addressed.

##### **2.3.4.1 Serving the ‘spiritually’ poor**

It could be argued that material affluence can create its own spiritual poverty (2.2.2.1), and that all schools, including and perhaps especially Catholic fee charging schools, are challenged in addressing this.



Wealth and privilege often render the poor invisible. It is a challenge of prophetic leadership to see the needs within and beyond the school and to have the courage to act accordingly. Catholic schools should also raise the consciousness of students to the glaring and widening discrepancies of wealth between developed and developing countries. (O’Keefe 2003, p. 97)

Pope Francis concurs and draws attention to the educational challenge facing Catholic schools whose young people have grown up ‘in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits’ (Pope Francis 2015, para. 56). While O’Keefe (2003) and Pope Francis (2015) are not referring specifically to fee charging schools, it could be argued that the sentiment expressed in these statements would resonate perhaps even more powerfully with students from materially affluent backgrounds as characteristic of fee charging schools.

As already observed (2.2.2.2) *Gravissimum educationis* ‘earnestly entreats pastors and all the faithful’ to:

spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfil their function in a continually more perfect way, and in especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of Faith. (Second Vatican Council 1965b, para. 9)

Likewise, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) recognises the mission of the Catholic school to serve the poor, which also implies an understanding of poverty that may be spiritual and can exclude material poverty. It refers to ‘those who have lost all sense of meaning in life and lack any type of inspiring ideal, those to whom no values are proposed and who do not know the beauty of faith, who come from families which are broken and incapable of love’ (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, para. 15). Collins (2012) also contends that ‘responsibility for the materially and spiritually poor will continue to be central in ... the founding of religious congregations and in the reconfiguration of trusteeship’ (Collins 2012, p. 73).

Findings from the Ethos Appraisal (2015) suggest ‘varying levels of religious practice among staff and students in each [Spiritian] school’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 11). Spiritian documentation states that, ‘at a time when traditional Catholic values

are under scrutiny the school provides a supportive environment for the inculcation of gospel values' (DEA 2015, p. 38). Egan (2014) draws attention to 'a wave of materialism', identified by the Pope John Paul II during his 1979 to Ireland, 'as a serious threat to the faith' that has facilitated 'a huge exodus of believers from the Church, so that widespread apathy and denial in matters of faith have come to prevail and much of what previous generations accepted as normative for Irish culture and identity has been undermined' (Egan 2014, p. 1).

### **2.3.5. Catholic and Spiritan schools: using their advantage to serve the poor**

While it could be argued that, in serving the materially wealthy but spiritually poor, fee charging schools are serving a different type of poverty, the proposal that fee charging schools, though lacking social diversity, serve the materially poor in a different way, will now be explored.

#### **2.3.5.1 Influence: shaping leaders to work *with* the poor**

According to Dorr (2012, p. 272), Catholic patrons may justify their involvement in fee charging schools on the basis they 'can move the rich toward greater social awareness by working closely with them and for them, for instance, by providing expensive high-class education for their children'. Collins (2012) concurs, noting, the church 'is a church for all, and chooses to constantly identify the needs of the poor and the marginalised ... [it] calls the wealthy and successful to respond to the poor' (Collins 2012, p. 91).

Spiritan school communities 'recognise their economic and educational privilege and that this privilege carries a responsibility towards those less well off' (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 19). This idea of shaping future leaders who will utilise their privilege to serve others is referred to in the Ethos Appraisal (2015) in the following way:

Students imitate the behaviour modelled for them by the management and staff of the school. Senior students in turn model good civic behaviour to junior students... This experiential learning is designed to instil civic spirit, and, it is hoped, will result in students assuming roles of service in the future. Each school can identify former students now giving service to the Church, Irish society and the international community. (Ethos Committee 2015, pp. 21–22)

### 2.3.5.2 Promoting concern *for* and *with* the poor

Catholic and Spiritan fee charging schools bear witness to narrow service and demonstrate concern *for* the poor through abundant works of charity (Grace 2013), such as fundraising activities, soccer marathons, Christmas tree sales, fasts, etc., (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2013, p. 3). In making ‘serious efforts to reach out to socially deprived communities, to pupils with special needs and to foster an ever deeper sense of social awareness among all members of their school communities’ (Catholic Schools Partnership 2011, p. 13), and in striving ‘to avoid the risk of becoming a sign that is contradictory in terms of Christ’s mission’ (ibid., p. 13), many Catholic and Spiritan fee charging schools have tried to express concern *with* the poor, understood in its more integral/broad meaning, by adopting missionary immersion and pastoral placement programmes. Recent studies of service learning programmes undertaken in Spiritan fee charging schools indicate that, when carried out in an appropriate manner, they have the potential to deepen empathy among the students who participate in them, ‘engaging the head, heart and hands in harmony’ (Ryan 2015, p. 79).

In a real sense the immersion experience has the potential of connecting the whole school with Spiritan mission that prompts a greater appreciation of different cultures and life experience from what were traditionally known as “mission countries”. (DEA 2015, p. 55)

When ‘well-planned and executed’, immersion projects can have ‘a powerful effect on faith development’ and be ‘truly transformative’ (O’Reilly 2015, p. 77). The provincial echoes this sentiment stating:

Experiences of contrast and of other cultures and systems of meaning can form an important part of our initiation into adulthood. But only if they are part of a reflective experience that is not only prepared but also accompanied and reflected on ... Our Spiritan tradition speaks about *pilgrimage to the poor*. This is not an easy thing not least because it can also lead, paradoxically, to reinforce attitudes of paternalism or subtle superiority. I think that in the context of the school experience the emphasis has to be on the transformation of the student and not necessarily the altruistic possibilities that it offers. (Whelan 2016)

It is important to note that the impact of these service learning experiences focuses on the ‘privileged’ students engaged in them. In that sense they may be successful in moving these students to a greater social awareness. The impact these programmes have on ‘the poor’ who are being engaged *with* is not assessed and therefore one would question the purpose and effectiveness of these programmes in expressing concern *with* the poor. This argument is explored in Chapters Five and Six of this study.

### **2.3.6 Part Two: concluding thoughts**

‘Fee-paying schools may make up a small fraction of the 374 Catholic secondary schools in the Republic, but they play a huge role in perpetuating social division by anointing special advantages on a privileged few’ (Humphreys 2014). Hederman (2012, p. 181) disagrees. He states that:

If, as people do say, [fee charging education] is a privileged education, then we say that it *is* education and anything less than this is not. If it is not possible to provide this privilege for every child in this country, then at least let those who want it, who cherish it, and who can afford it, take up the offer. Equality of educational opportunity should not mean that no one in the country should be educated in case they might have an unfair advantage over the rest.

It is clear from this review that, in terms of social class and socio-economic student composition, schools in Ireland differ, and these differences impact on students’ academic and non-academic outcomes. Middle class students in secondary schools are more likely to, be allocated to higher academic streams, experience positive learning environments (more time on task and less discipline-related disruption), develop a positive self-image and to, have significantly higher educational attainment and progression to higher education than working class students in other school types. In addition to enjoying these enhanced student outcomes, students attending fee charging secondary schools (characterised by middle class/high socio-economic composition) are further advantaged in terms of their access to extra-curricular activities and superior resources. Students in fee charging schools are more likely to avail of private tuition, least likely to experience barriers (economic or cultural) in terms of access to higher education, and are best positioned to access higher education courses.

The findings of *Governance and Funding of Second-Level Schools in Ireland* (ESRI 2013), however, advise caution in estimating the current advantage of voluntary secondary schools over other school types. Findings from *Fee charging schools: analysis of fee income* (DES 2013) also suggest that, as some fee charging schools are significantly more advantaged than others, analysis of fee charging schools as one homogenous group is perhaps too simplistic. Controlling for other factors (most notably socio-economic background), school type has a limited impact (Smyth 1999, OECD 2012) and private tuition has no impact (Smyth 2009) on academic performance.

It is inevitable that within congregations strong views will be held and tensions will arise in response to what Dorr (2012, p. 272) identifies as ‘the crucial question’, namely, ‘what should committed Church people be saying to the rich by their words and actions?’. Based on this study-by-study empirical review, one could conclude that, in continuing their patronage of fee charging schools, Catholic religious orders are at best ‘unintentionally’ endorsing the perpetuation of educational and social class inequality. A less favourable interpretation might suggest that it represents a struggle on behalf of religious orders to maintain status and power positions in education. It is however important to acknowledge the complex nature of the historical and social context that characterised the evolution of religious congregations in Ireland (Coolahan 1981). The Catholic church in Ireland, ‘though it represented the majority of the population had suffered much suppression’ (Coolahan 1981, p. 17) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Secondary education was ‘seriously hindered by the operation of the penal laws’ (ibid, p. 57) begun in the seventeenth century which ‘forbade Catholics to send their children abroad to be educated, to set up schools in Ireland or to teach Catholic children’ (ibid., p. 9). Despite the fact that ‘Catholics formed 77 per cent of the population of the total population in 1871’, only ‘50 per cent of pupils in superior schools were Catholic’ (ibid., p. 60). Many religious orders founded schools in Ireland in the nineteenth century (e.g. Loreto, Christian Brothers, Jesuits, Sisters of Mercy and the Spiritans) (Coolahan 1981, p. 57). These congregations ‘were devoted to a mixture of social provision and evangelisation both for the poor and the bourgeoisie’ (Fahey 2007, p.145) at a time when (in terms of social provision) state provision was ‘not

generous' (ibid., p. 146). Once their reputations became established, these congregations soon found themselves, 'subject to upward social drift'. (ibid., p. 147). Fahey (2007, p. 147) remarks:

they found it difficult to resist the demand from the Catholic middle classes that they expand their services upwards on the social scale. Any potential they might have had for substantial social distribution down the social scale was thus compromised.... As Catholic social services matured in the first half of the twentieth century, they became more rather than less associated with social privilege and eventually came to form as much an obstacle to the equitable distribution as a means of promoting it.

In defining 'poverty' in material terms, it is difficult to see how Catholic fee charging schools serve the poor (*diakonia* in its integral sense). The suggestions, however, that Catholic and Spiritan fee charging schools serve a different type of poverty and use their advantage to serve the materially poor in a different way (e.g. by educating future leaders in society) are interesting concepts and are addressed in the findings of this study (Chapter Four and Chapter Five). In the following chapter (Chapter Three) the research methodology employed in this study is presented.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This study seeks to explore the understanding of service, as perceived by three stakeholder groups, in second-level fee charging Spiritan schools. This chapter outlines the theoretical perspectives that underpin the study and the research design employed which provides the structure for this exploration. The role of the researcher is presented (see also 1.5). The strategies of inquiry and the data analysis procedure employed are outlined. The chapter concludes by addressing the ethical issues considered in this study.

#### **3.2 Locating the Study on the Research Continuum**

All research is interpretive, it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 22)

As a researcher, I am bound within a net of 'ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises (Bateson 1972, cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 22) for which the term 'paradigm', originally used by Kuhn (1962) to describe a set of beliefs that guide action, may be used. The positivist/post-positivist and constructivist-interpretive paradigms broadly shape the continuum of research along which quantitative and qualitative research methods are located as different points as opposed to representing 'two ends in a dichotomy' (Creswell 2012, p. 19). In the positivist paradigm it is asserted that 'there is a stable and unchanging reality out there to be studied, captured and understood' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 11) 'using the empirical methods of objective social science' (ibid., p. 8). Based on the notion that social phenomena can be viewed and treated as things, positivism is 'objectivist through and through' (Crotty 1998, p. 27). Post-positivism contends that 'reality can never be fully apprehended, only approximated' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 11) and, as such, 'research outcomes are neither totally objective nor unquestionably certain' (Crotty 1998, p. 40). The assumptions of the post-positivist worldview 'hold true more for quantitative research than qualitative research' (Creswell 2009, p. 6). In quantitative research the investigator 'describes a research

problem through a description of trends ... creating purpose statements that are specific, narrow, measurable and observable' (Creswell 2012, p. 13). The investigation relies on statistical analysis. Whereas quantitative researchers, through the use of 'remote inferential empirical methods are seldom able to capture their subjects' perspectives' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 12), as a qualitative researcher it is my contention that, by the interpretive nature of my research, I derive rich, thick descriptions of the case under review. Quantitative researchers regard the 'empirical materials produced by interpretive methods as unreliable, impressionistic and not objective' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 12) and contend that qualitative researchers 'write fiction not science' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 8). But as all research is couched in words, it is my considered view that all research can be viewed as subjective and interpretive.

### **3.2.1 A constructivist-interpretive paradigm**

This study is shaped by a constructivist-interpretive paradigm (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Lincoln and Guba 1985). In contrast to the aforementioned positivist/post-positivist paradigm, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm assumes a 'relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings) and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 24). This paradigm holds that we, as social actors, are 'constantly involved in interpreting ... and developing meanings' (Crotty 1998, p. 56). Although qualitative research has 'no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own', being instead 'multiparadigmatic', as 'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 7), it is interpretive. As a qualitative researcher shaped by a constructivist-interpretivist framework, I seek to explore an issue (Spiritual mission of service in fee charging schools as perceived by parents, principals and the patron body) and 'to understand the contexts and settings in which the participants in the study address this issue' (Creswell 2007, p. 40).



### **3.2.2 Contextual constructivism**

‘Constructivism recognises that individuals develop subjective meanings of their contextualised experience. These meanings are multiple and varied’ (Cullen 2013, p. 14). The type of constructivism employed in this case study is contextual, as opposed to strict constructivism. Burningham and Cooper (1999, p. 304) argue that ‘constructivism’ and ‘constructionism’ are used to refer to the same phenomenon but that strict constructivism ‘focuses entirely on the claims’ made about ‘reality’ and does not accept an objective reality outside such claims. On the other hand, Cullen (2013, p. 13) argues that the term ‘contextual constructivism’ recognises objective reality and its influence, and in so doing it allows for a more nuanced reading of real-life situations. As Crotty states, ‘the existence of a world without a mind is conceivable. Meaning without a mind is not ... meaning is not discovered, but constructed’ (Crotty 1998, pp. 8–10).

Rooted in this paradigm, I see myself as a ‘co-constructor of knowledge, of understanding and interpretation of lived experiences’ (Guba and Lincoln 2005, cited in Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011, p. 106; Crotty 1998) shaped by my own experience (Creswell 2007, p. 20). Underpinning contextual constructivism is the assumption that ‘the task of research is to interpret a context so as to understand it and maybe learn from it, change it or confirm it’ (Cullen 2013, p. 21). This assumption is consistent with the educational philosophy underlying this study (1.6). Commitment to a constructivist viewpoint does not, however, require the belief that all constructions are of equal value or all views are of equal merit. As Stake remarks, ‘personal civility or political ideology may call for respecting every view, but the rules of case study do not’ (Stake 1995, p. 103).

### **3.3. Research Design: Case Study**

This study is a single intrinsic case study, defined by ‘interest in an individual case’ (Stake 1955, p. 3), namely the Spiritan mission of service in fee charging Spiritan schools. It is intrinsic in nature because ‘the case is of primary interest to me for its own sake, not because [it] represents other cases’ (Stake 2005, p. 443). Bearing in mind, however, that there is ‘no hard-and-fast line distinguishing intrinsic case study

from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose' (Stake 2005, p. 445), it could be argued that this case is also instrumental, in that I am interested in gaining insight into an issue (i.e. how a particular Catholic religious order conceives of its mission of service in a contemporary context).

Creswell (2012) argues that case study can be considered a type of ethnographic design which describes, analyses and interprets 'a culture-sharing group's shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs and language that develops over time' (Creswell 2012, p. 462). One of the key characteristics of ethnographic research is the study of cultural themes. A cultural theme is defined as 'a general position declared or implied, that is openly approved or promoted in a society or group' (ibid., p. 468). This theme does not, Creswell argues, 'seek to narrow the study; instead it becomes a broad lens that researchers use when they initially enter the field to study a group' (ibid., p. 468). Creswell, however, contends that case study differs from ethnography in that the focus of a case study may not always be a group per se and the case study researcher 'may be more interested in describing the activities of the group instead of identifying shared patterns of behaviour within the group' (ibid., p. 469), which is characteristic of ethnography. Case study researchers are also 'less likely to develop a cultural theme to examine at the beginning of a study ... instead they focus on an in-depth exploration of the actual case' (Yin 2008, p. 465).

This case study embraces elements of ethnography in the following ways. In studying the Spiritan mission of service (as an overarching cultural theme) and the shared beliefs (i.e. perceptions of service from the perspective of three stakeholder groups), it has resonance with ethnographic research. The issue may arise in ethnography as to 'whether the patterns are ideal (what *should* occur), actual (what *did* occur), or projective (what *might have* occurred)' (Creswell 2012, p. 470). In exploring the uneasy tension surrounding Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools and the perceived contradiction between the espoused mission to serve the poor and the operative mission of serving the rich, this case study addresses this ethnographic issue. The issue of context is also relevant in this regard. Context and 'natural settings' (Bassey 1999, p. 47) are of interest in undertaking a case study. Social, economic, political and ethical contexts are often of interest in a case study, and historical context is 'almost always of interest' (Stake 2005, p. 449). Context in

ethnographic study is ‘multi-layered and interrelated’ (ibid., p. 473). The research questions of this study are not ‘simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical and especially personal contexts’ (Stake 1995, p. 17).

This case study employs ‘detailed and thick description’ of the case (Creswell 2012, p. 473) in data analysis as characteristic of ethnographic research. During interpretation in ethnography, the researcher ‘relates both the description and the themes back to a larger portrait of what was learned, which often reflects some combination of the researcher making a personal assessment, returning to the literature on the cultural theme and raising further questions on the data’ (ibid., p. 473). This resonates with the research methodology undertaken in this case study.

As it focuses on the understanding of a ‘particular project’, in this instance the cultural theme of service, ‘though still aspiring to understand the case in its socio-cultural context and with concepts of culture in mind’ (Simons 2009, p. 23), this study could be considered a micro-ethnographic case study, as opposed to a classical ethnographic case study, ‘which has traditionally involved long-time immersion in the field in societies beyond our own’ (Simons 2009, p. 23).

Narrative research typically focuses on studying an individual person. While this case study does not tell the story of a single person, as it presents a composition, montage, or bricolage (portraying the perceptions of a cultural-sharing group) and seeks to report their story in their own words, it contains elements of narrative research.

### **3.3.1 Limitations of case study**

Due to the fact that case studies are ‘strong in reality’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 292) and generate socially-embedded concrete knowledge, they are criticised for their perceived inability to generate theoretical knowledge and generalisations (Flyvbjerg 2011, pp. 301–302). Much of what we know about the empirical world has, however, been produced by case study research (ibid., p. 302) and, since in the particular lies the general, it is important to bear in mind that, through its vivid and colourful ‘thick’ description and socially embedded nature, the intrinsic case study can be a small step toward generalisation (Stake 1995). Case study is criticised for its perceived bias toward verification of the researcher’s

preconceived notions. 'Experience [however] indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification as case study provides deeper insights into a phenomenon which may dispel pre-existing notions that the researcher may have held' (Ladden 2015, p. 108). This case is unique and generalisability was not sought. According to Stake, the real business of case study is particularisation (Stake 1995, p. 8), in which 'the purpose of the case study is not to represent the world but to represent the case' (Stake 2005, p. 448).

### **3.4 Research Method: Through the Prism**

Through triangulating the multiple perspectives (Lincoln and Guba 1985) of the previously 'silent' (Lynch 2001) voices within fee charging schools with the critical voices from literature and with Spiritan documentation, this small intrinsic case study (Stake 1995) aims to facilitate a dialogue of transformation. Underlying my role as researcher is the assumption that 'meaning is produced in the dialogue rather than reproduced by the researcher' (Cullen 2013, p. 23). The richness and variance of opinion which I hope will emerge among the participants in the study will be like light hitting a crystal reflecting different perspectives and voices, creating 'different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions' (Richardson 2000, p. 934). It is my hope that, through this process, a rich and complex picture of the case will emerge (Creswell 2012, p. 18). As it is important in naturalistic case studies to allow participants, 'events and situations ... to speak for themselves' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 290), I see myself as a facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction (Guba and Lincoln 2005).

### **3.5 The Researcher**

It is only possible to observe from within one's own historical location;  
thus human inquiry is inevitably interpretive and inherently subjective.  
Subjectivity is not bias. (Greene 2007, p. 40)

As a qualitative insider researcher my approach to this study is subjectivist as opposed to objectivist. I am not therefore seeking the absolute, external and quantifiable truth 'out there'. I acknowledge that my own experiences and background shape how I see the world and am cognisant of the fact that the research process is an interactive process, influenced by my values and beliefs. As a

researcher who is ‘already engaged in the world’ (Schwandt 2007, p. 156) my intention is not ‘not to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it’ (Stake 1995, p. 43). In qualitative research the researcher assumes a personal as opposed to impersonal role (Stake 1995, p. 37). It is for this reason, that I use the first-person pronoun *I* throughout this study (Creswell 2012, p. 280).

According to Simons, ‘elements of different roles can be integrated at different stages in the research’ (Simons 2009, p. 37). The relationship between the researcher and participants in this study is not completely ‘bilateral’ in the sense that researcher and participant are not working together ‘as coresearchers and cosubjects designing, managing and drawing conclusions from the research’ (Schwandt 2007, p. 45). Nevertheless, as I seek to conduct research *with* rather than *on* people my role embraces ‘co-operative inquiry’ (Heron and Reason 2001; Schwandt 2007, p. 45). As I employ ‘possibilizing strategies’ which (through displaying ‘multiple readings and alternative actions that the reader can consider’ and by presenting ‘multiple speakers to establish various perspective, juxtapositions and collaborations’) seek to ‘enrich or disrupt normative understanding’, my role could be termed ‘evocative’ (Pelias 2011, p. 662). In this study I employed a variety of different tools, methods and techniques, juxtaposing, overlapping and blending images, sounds and understandings, piecing together and constructing representations to form a composite montage containing different voices, different perspectives, points of view, angles of vision, ‘fitted to the specifics of a complex situation’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 4). As an interpreter I am ‘the agent of interpretation, new knowledge but also new illusion’ (Stake 1995, p. 99).

Despite concerted efforts I am also aware that ‘it is unlikely, by force of human nature, that neutrality was maintained at all times’ (ibid., pp. 109-110). I am also cognisant of the fact that adopting multiple positions ‘can cause tensions and conflicting allegiances; the negotiation of sometimes delicate and fraught situations and requires great consideration and reflection on the part of the researcher’. In exercising reflexivity, I have outlined my relationship with the group (Pelias 2011, p. 662) i.e. the research site and participants (1.7) and will now present my foreshadowed issues and observations.

### **3.5.1 Foreshadowing issues**

There is no particular moment when data gathering begins. It begins before there is a commitment to do the study; backgrounding, acquaintance with other cases, first impressions. (Stake 1995, p. 49)

Stake (1995) argues that, while patterns of meaning will sometimes emerge unexpectedly from the analysis, ‘often patterns will be known in advance, drawn from the research questions, serving as template for the analysis’ (Stake 1995, p. 78). He goes on to state that ‘the main decisions as to what to look for, thus the coding categories, and the potential correspondences, will usually be made before the data is collected’ (ibid., p. 84). Issue questions (primary research questions) in case study are, as previously stated, ‘not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical and especially personal contexts’ (ibid., p. 17). There is, Bazeley (2009, p. 9) notes, ‘no problem with a priori categories or themes as long as they are recognised and declared as such, and they are actually supported in the data’. The analyst can still ‘retain flexibility and be open to the presence of finer nuances or different emphases in the data’ (ibid.). While I did not approach the study with a priori themes for analysis, I equally did not begin the study with little sense of potential and relevant issues. I approached the study with ‘foreshadowed issues’, which ‘offer a guide as to what to explore but do not constrain the research process’. These foreshadowed issues ‘may change or be redefined as you start data gathering and as knowledge of the field deepens’ (Simons 2009, p. 33). The concept of progressive focusing (Parlett and Hamilton 1976) is often used to describe this process of redefining these issues and was employed in this study.

### **3.5.2 Observations**

The foreshadowed issues with which I approached this study emerged primarily from my own observations based on my prolonged engagement in the field of Spiritan education, from an initial overview of Spiritan documentation and from the perceptions of fee charging schools in literature. Bearing in mind that ‘often we cannot tell the exact meaning without knowledge of the context and history before our arrival on the scene’ (Simons 2009, p. 59), I approached the study with my own knowledge, experience and observations. Prior to the formal undertaking of research via Ed.D., I was a teacher in a fee charging Spiritan school for fifteen years. If this

constituted prolonged engagement in the field, which it arguably might, it was an unreflective engagement in the field. As a reflexive researcher (Schwandt 2007, p. 260), I realise that I came to the study with ‘a considerable portion of data [which is] impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case’ (Stake 1995, p. 49). It is, however, my intention to acknowledge my observations in the study instead of ‘bracketing’ them out (Schwandt 2007, p. 24).

Fee charging Spiritan schools are, according to my observations, characterised by the following: a strong sense of community (high levels of involvement from parents and past pupils); active commitment to fundraising; advantages in terms of extra-curricular facilities, especially sport; a broad curriculum; dwindling presence of ‘on the ground’ Spiritan priests; high parental expectations and focus on academics; high number of past pupils on staff and family connections with the school. It is also important to state that I am not a past pupil of a fee charging or Spiritan school. The socio-economic profile which characterised the schools that I attended was mixed. In addition to this, I worked (one year) full-time and (four years) part-time in the area of extreme social disadvantage with members of the Traveller Community.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

Data were collected from six semi-structured interviews, undertaken with the patron representative and with all five principals, a parental survey questionnaire issued to parents in fee charging Spiritan schools and documentary analysis of Spiritan documentation.

#### **3.6.1 Sampling**

This study sought to explore stakeholder perceptions of the Spiritan mission of service in all second-level fee charging Spiritan schools. The three stakeholder groups selected were parents, principals and the patron/trustee body. The rationale for the selection of these three stakeholder groups is outlined in Chapter One (1.7). Purposive sampling, the intentional selection of individuals and sites best placed to assist in developing a detailed understanding of the case (Creswell 2012, p. 206) and ‘which increases the scope and range of data exposed as well as the likelihood that

the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.40), as opposed to random or representative sampling, which ‘is more likely to suppress more deviant cases’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 40), was used in this case study. Nevertheless, as there are only five second-level fee charging Spiritan schools, this study is concerned with a population as opposed to a sample.

### **3.6.2 Strategies of inquiry: an overview**

Although the structure, emphasis and style of questionnaire differed slightly in relation to the stakeholder group being addressed, the questions formulated and put to all stakeholder groups emerged from my own observations, initial analysis of Spiritan documentation and review of the literature. Questions addressed to all stakeholders focused on the following themes.

1. The nature of the Spiritan mission of service currently offered in second-level fee charging Spiritan schools as perceived by the stakeholders
2. The operative mission of fee charging schools to serve the poor
3. The perception that fee charging Spiritan schools provide education for transformation
4. The perception that these schools, by the nature of their socio-economic composition and through their fee charging structures, serve the rich as opposed to the poor

For a full outline of the questions addressed to the individual stakeholder groups, please see Appendices B–D.

Bearing in mind the iterative nature of the research methodology employed in this study, the major themes and minor themes were developed both deductively and inductively. Each of these themes was tested against the data, and minor sub-themes emerged. In so doing, it was my intention that ‘many of these early impressions will later be refined or replaced’, but the ‘pool of data includes the earliest observations’ (Stake 1995, p. 49). The overarching theme for the study was ‘service’. The major themes and minor sub-themes that emerged are reported in Chapter Four.



### 3.6.2.1 Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis can be ‘a helpful precursor ... to interviewing... offering clues to understanding the culture of organizations, the values underlying policies ... suggesting issues it may be useful to explore’ (Simons 2009, pp. 63–64). Alternatively, it may be ‘a major method that can be employed’ (ibid.). Documents may, however, be ‘selective, partial, biased, non-neutral and incomplete’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 564). Bearing in mind that historical context is ‘almost always of interest’ in a case study (Stake 2005, p. 449), my study commenced with an analysis of documents and other archival material pertaining directly to the Spiritans. As access to the provincial archives could be facilitated, analysis of documents was limited and other documents (most notably historical Chapter meetings) proved themselves to be ‘difficult to obtain’ (Creswell 2012, p. 223). Nevertheless, the documents accessed proved to be invaluable both in terms of suggesting issues to pursue in interviews and in generating categories for analysis (see Chapters Four and Five). An analysis of Spiritan documentation was integrated into the literature review (Chapter Two) of this study.

Creswell draws a distinction between public and private documents. Public documents include ‘minutes from meetings, official memos, records in the public domain, and archival material in libraries’ (Creswell 2012, p. 223). Examples of private documents include ‘personal journals and diaries, letters, personal notes and jottings individuals write to themselves’ (ibid.) Records of the Spiritan Chapter meetings and of the Spiritan core values in education (Appendix A) are readily available in the public domain (on the internet) and can be classified as public documents. The Spiritan Rules and Constitutions, Spiritan educational and ethos documents and draft documents for discussion (DEA 2006, 2011, 2013; Ethos Committee 2015) and the Report on the Mission Audit (McEvoy 2014) although not readily available in the public domain can be accessed via the offices of the SET and can be classified as public documents. With the exception of one document (Whelan 2016) which was obtained directly from the author, all Spiritan documentation was accessed with the consent of my gatekeeper via the office of the SET or via the Blackrock College archives.

### **3.6.2.2 Semi-structured interviews**

‘The interview is the main road to multiple realities’ (Stake 1995, p. 64).

Interviews were chosen as one method of data collection in this case study. An interview is a ‘purposeful’ (Burgess 1984, p. 102) and ‘guided’ conversation seeking in-depth knowledge (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Increasingly, ‘researchers are realising that interviews are not neutral tools of data collection but rather active interactions between people leading to contextualised based results’ (Coulter 2012, p. 94). As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 18) state, ‘the process of knowing through conversations is intersubjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge.’ Interviews were undertaken in the hope of aggregating ‘perceptions or knowledge over multiple respondents’ and providing ‘rich, thick descriptions’ of the case (Stake 1995, p. 65).

Over the course of one academic year, semi-structured audio-recorded interviews of approximately 50 mins duration with ‘key informants’ (1.5) i.e. the principals of all five second-level fee charging Spiritan schools and patron representative were undertaken. For a full outline of the interview questions for, principals see Appendix B and for, patron representative see Appendix C. Semi-structured interviews were chosen, as the questions provided a loose structure for stimulating points of interest that afforded the key informants movement and freedom for extensive elaboration. Group interviews were not chosen because, although they are ‘economical, ... enable you to get a sense of the degree of agreement on issues and ... provide a cross-check on the consistency of perspectives and statements of certain individuals’ and can be ‘less threatening to any one individual’ (Simons 2009, p. 49), they are difficult to transcribe and, more importantly and of direct relevance to this study, they can fall prey to “group think” or dominant individuals taking over the interview and preventing diverse responses’ (ibid., p. 49).

As interviewing can be considered a craft that one learns through practice (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 17), an initial set of pilot interviews was conducted.

### **3.6.2.3 The parental survey questionnaire**

I wanted to ‘hear’ from as many parents as possible in the population of schools being studied. One-to-one interviews, though ‘useful for asking sensitive questions’ (Creswell 2012, p. 384), ‘do not protect the anonymity of the participant as questionnaires do’ (ibid.). Bearing in mind both the impracticality and the undesirability of carrying out one-to-one interviews and the drawbacks of group interviews (as stated in 3.6.2.2), I decided to undertake a web-based questionnaire (Parental Survey Questionnaire: Appendix D). Questionnaires provide anonymity and can help the researcher ‘learn about individual attitudes, opinions, beliefs and practices’ (Creswell 2012, p. 384). Web-based questionnaires in particular ‘allow effective and economical surveying of the entire population’ (ibid.) and can ‘reach a geographically dispersed population’ (ibid., p. 403) but ‘may be biased towards certain demographic groups that tend to use computers’ (Creswell 2012, p. 384). This demographic is representative of the population I studied.

The population targeted in the questionnaire was parents with children in all five second-level fee charging Spiritan schools. A web-based parental questionnaire was created and analysed using Google docs. An email containing the link to my on-line parental survey questionnaire (Appendix E) was sent to the principals who in turn sent it out (via their database) to parents. Principals of all five schools consented to send out a web-based survey questionnaire to the parents of children attending their schools. Respondents were not required to answer all questions for completion of the survey. The survey questionnaire sought to explore the reasons why parents choose to send their sons/daughters to fee charging Spiritan schools. It also intended to examine parents’ understanding of the service offered by these schools and in particular their understanding of the manner in which these schools serve the poor. In terms of the parental questionnaire, a composite picture of the parental perceptions of the service offered by second-level fee charging Spiritan schools in general was sought, and no cross-analysis was undertaken.

When conducting research addressing sensitive issues, questions need to be ‘tactfully stated’ to avoid running the risk of individuals over or under-representing their views, which leads to bias (Creswell 2012, p. 386). In devising good questions, it is recommended that sensitive questions are placed late in the survey ‘after the individual has “warmed-up” by answering neutral’ and closed-ended questions which have clear ‘parameters of response options’ (ibid.). In an effort to maintain a level of neutrality in relation to the sensitive research questions of my study, I modified a survey used by the Irish Bishops (O’Mahony 2008). Permission to use this survey as a template was received from the author. Questions 3–16 of my survey were taken from the O’Mahony (2008) survey. The pre-coded nature of these closed-ended questions could be viewed as restrictive. The purpose of these questions was however two-fold; firstly, they were intended to ‘warm-up’ respondents and act as a stimulus for the more sensitive, challenging and open-ended questions (Q. 22 and Q. 23), which constituted the main focus of this study, and secondly, they were chosen to set a context and to frame the themes which had emerged from the Spiritan documentary analysis, the literature review and the semi-structured interviews.

The open-ended questions did ‘not restrain individual responses [but] the categorisation of these responses into themes proved a very time-consuming process’ (Creswell 2012, p. 218, p. 387). Respondents were free to choose which questions to answer; completion of all questions was not required in order to progress within or to complete or submit the survey. As this survey questionnaire assessed information at one point in time, it was a cross-sectional as opposed to a longitudinal study (Creswell 2012, p. 405).

A total of 316 respondents were registered. Creswell (2012) notes that ‘even a small return rate may not be biased and may be acceptable in research’ (Creswell 2012, p. 390). The schools with the highest response rate, i.e. schools 1, 2 and 3, are Dublin-based schools. This response rate may be acceptable, but it created a bias in the research. The parental voice in this study, while arguably representative of the parental body of fee charging Dublin-based schools, may not be representative of the population sought in this study i.e. parents with children in fee charging Spiritan schools in Ireland.

The numbers and rates of overall response from each school are listed in Table 3.1 below:

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5
Percentage of parental responses for this study	61.7%	21.9%	14.8%	1.6%	0%
Response rate of school	25%	23%	13%	Less than 1%	0%

Table 3.1: Parental Survey Questionnaire School Response Rate

### 3.7 Data Analysis Overview

‘There is no particular moment when data analysis begins’ (Stake 1995, p. 72).

Data analysis is an iterative process; ‘often the patterns will be known in advance, drawn from the research questions... sometimes, the patterns will emerge unexpectedly from the analysis’ (Stake 1995, p. 78). Consistent with the methodology employed in this study, the data collection and analysis procedure was an iterative/spiral process as opposed to a sequential one. A brief outline of the research project as it occurred in real time is outlined in Appendix F.

#### 3.7.1 Coding participants and parental survey questionnaire responses

All principals were assigned a number 1–5 (P1 = Principal 1, etc.). The patron representative was referred to as the PR. There were 202 parental responses to Q. 22 (Explain how fee charging schools serve the poor). There were 201 responses to Q. 23 (How do fee charging schools provide education for transformation?). There were 76 responses to Q. 24 (Any other comments).

Each individual response (as opposed to respondent) to the open-ended questions in the parental survey was assigned a number with the prefix PT (indicating parent); thus the first response to Q. 22 is labelled as PT 22/1, the second response to Q. 23 is labelled PT 23/2, and so on.

### **3.7.2 Inductive data analysis procedure**

As opposed to being prescribed, the design of this study was emergent. Data analysis was inductive and a text database was gathered from which ‘patterns, categories and themes’ (Creswell 2007, p. 38) were organized and words analysed ‘to describe the central phenomenon under study’ (ibid., p. 18).

#### **3.7.2.1 Steps of the process**

The small nature of the database meant that it was easy to keep track of files and to locate text passages. Therefore, hand-analysis of the interview transcripts was employed, rather than computer programmes such as NVivo. This method ensured that I remained close to the data and retained a ‘hands-on feel’ (Creswell 2012, p. 240). In terms of the process, the following steps were undertaken.

Data from all documents and interview transcripts were collected, the audio material was transcribed, read through to get a general sense of meaning, and prepared for analysis. The data were then coded in line with Creswell’s description of the process of ‘segmenting and labelling text to form description and broad themes in the data’ (Creswell 2012, p. 243). This method of coding allowed me to ‘classify whole ... interviews or documents making them more appropriately retrievable at a later time’ (Stake 1995, p. 32). The codes in the documents and transcripts were underlined and labelled and the emerging themes were identified on the right hand margin of the transcripts and questionnaire response sheet and in a different colour to the code labels on the documents. Similar codes were grouped and listed. The codes were then reduced to four major themes. Themes were layered, and minor themes were subsumed within major themes.

A final ‘preliminary exploratory analysis’ (Creswell 2012, p. 243) was undertaken to obtain a general sense of all the data collected and to check for miscellaneous codes.

All transcripts and text responses to the open-ended questions of the parental questionnaire were coded and the guide of constant comparison in which the new data were compared with existing data and categories was employed (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 557). Categories were reviewed for overlap and where appropriate they were subdivided.

Figure 3.1 illustrates how the major theme ‘serving the poor’ evolved during the study. The colour yellow is used to indicate possible overlap with another theme, e.g. ‘sense of community’. The colour red was used for defining the nature of the service (narrow or integral) for the interpretation of findings (Chapter Five).

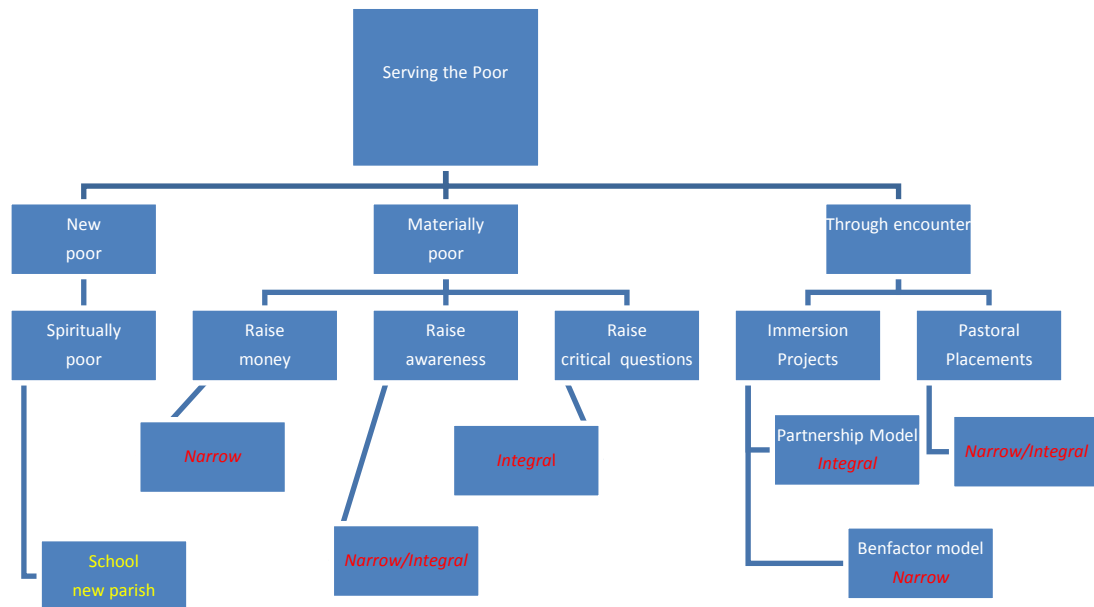


Figure 3.1: Development of Major Theme ‘Serving the Poor’

This data-analysis procedure is consistent with intrinsic case study, during which ‘the caseworker sequences the action, categorises properties, and makes tallies in some intuitive aggregation’ (Stake 1995, p. 74). The multiple sources of data were compared and cross-checked according to the major and minor themes. The category set of final major (and minor) themes that emerged from my research phases was *a* set as opposed to *the* set that provided a ‘reasonable (defined as a judgement that might be made subsequently by an auditor reviewing the process) construction of the

data' (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 347). *My* final set of themes was established and reported in the findings section of this study (Chapter Four).

According to Creswell, saturation point is a 'subjective assessment' (Creswell 2012, p. 251). The four criteria – exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories, emergence of regularities, i.e. a sense of 'integration', and overextension (Lincoln and Guba 1985, pp. 348–350) – and, at a more practical level, the time available for completion of the study, were used to inform a 'stop collecting and processing' decision.

### **3.8 Methods for Verification**

In qualitative research, data analysis is 'less a completely accurate representation (as in the numerical, positivist tradition) and more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualised data that are already interpretations of the social encounter' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 554). Verification in qualitative research is therefore established through trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and confirmability, (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as opposed 'to internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity' (Merriam 2009, p. 212). The methods to ensure verification used in this study were triangulation, thick description and peer debriefing (as indicated in Figure 3.2)

Triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation... The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry. (Flick 2002, p.227, 229)

Data derived from the researcher's observations, documentary analysis (of archival material relating to the mission of service in fee charging Spiritan schools), literature review, and transcripts from (semi-structured) interviews and questionnaires were collected, analysed and 'triangulated'. Multiple perspectives, among and within these sources, provided evidence for a theme and conveyed 'the complexity of the phenomenon' (Creswell 2012, p. 251).



Transferability was established through rich, thick descriptions of the case (Stake 1995). Consultation with a ‘critical friend’ who is a member of the broader Spiritan family but is ‘outside’ the case took place. As a peer, he ‘played the devil’s advocate’ and, though his opinion was valued, it did not exert ‘excessive’ influence over the research. This ‘peer debriefing’ assisted in establishing credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985, pp. 308–309). Although the conclusion of the categorisation process is an ideal time for member-checking, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusion are tested with members of those stakeholder groups from whom the data were originally collected (ibid., p. 314), the time constraints imposed on this study did not allow for this crucial technique in establishing credibility to be applied. ‘Verification is built into the entire research process with continual checks on the credibility, plausibility, and trustworthiness of the findings’ (Merriam 2009, p. 211). As my gatekeeper was regularly updated regarding the study’s progress, member-checking, though admittedly of a limited nature, was achieved. The image of a crystal is helpful in considering the richness and variety of opinion and perception among and within the data. In this sense, the image of the crystal as opposed to the triangle bears a closer resemblance to the research process and to the model of verification undertaken in this study (see Figure 3.2).

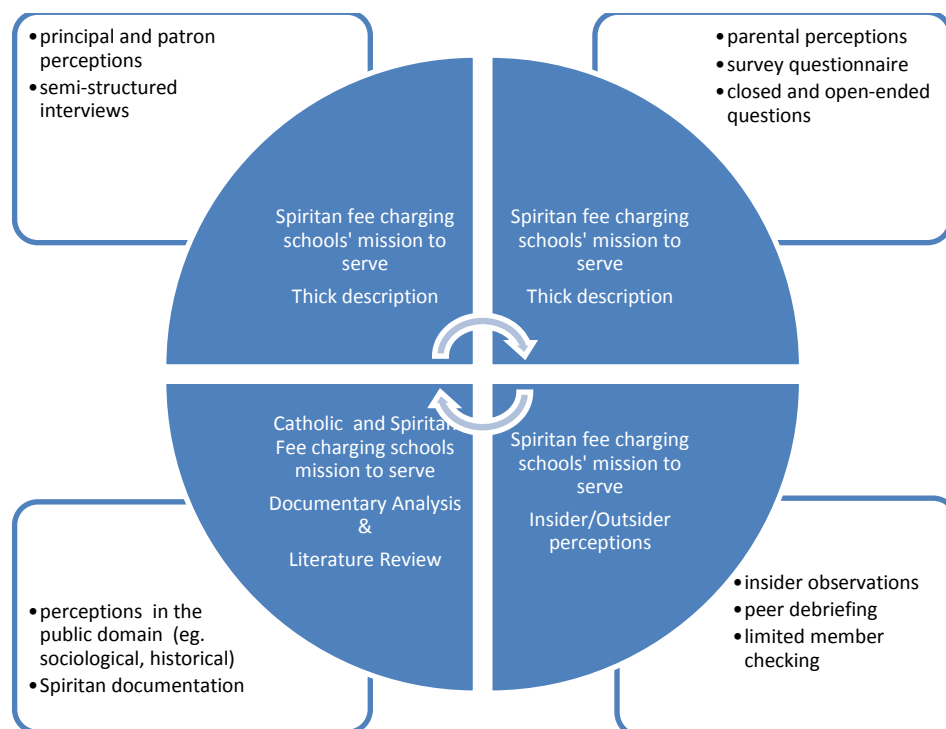


Figure 3.2: Model of Verification

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Participants were provided with the researcher's contact details (i.e. e-mail address) prior to the commencement of the study and were encouraged to ask any questions about the study either before or at any stage throughout the study. All interviewees received a Plain Language Statement (Appendix G) and a Consent to Participate Letter (Appendix H), which clearly stated that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. All interviewees were assigned numbers (Creswell 2012, p. 231), but as this case study concerns a population, as opposed to a sample, of five schools, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed to the principals or to the patron representative in this study. This was clearly outlined in the documentation provided (Appendix G). Interview questions were given to participants in advance of the interviews. All interviewees received a copy of the interview transcript, post-interview and prior to data analysis, and were invited to make amendments or to offer clarification on any segments of text. In only one case was the decision made to amend a segment of the text for clarification purposes. All interviewees received a brief summary of the findings upon completion of the study.

In relation to the parental survey, no name was requested; each response, as opposed to each parent, was identified with a number, and no school was associated with any individual parental response. In relation to parents, complete anonymity can be guaranteed. In terms of the parental survey questionnaire, a composite picture of the parental perceptions of the service offered by second-level fee charging Spiritan schools in general was drawn. Individual Spiritan schools were not identified. A brief overview of findings was shared with the patron body and with the board of management of each school.

Access to documents was gained through a gatekeeper. At our initial meeting issues, regarding the purpose and duration of the study, selection of research participants, reporting and sharing of research outcomes and possible gains of the study, were clearly outlined. At several stages throughout the research process he was provided with updates regarding the progress of the study. His contact details (e-mail) were accessed via the Spiritan website (<http://www.desplaces.ie/>). Access to a patron representative was gained through him.

The principals were contacted directly via e-mail. The e-mail addresses of principals were obtained via the relevant school's website. The principals in turn became gatekeepers, as access to parents was gained through them.

All data was stored on the researcher's PC and was password protected. A hard copy of all interview transcripts and parental survey questionnaire results was kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Upon completion of this study, all data were destroyed. The computer hard drive was wiped and the hard copy of the interview transcripts and parental survey questionnaire results were shredded.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The research design and data collection and analysis procedures were outlined in this chapter. A visual representation (Figure 3.2) of the model of verification employed in this study and the ethical considerations allowed for were presented. The findings gleaned from the use of the selected strategies of inquiry will be reported in Chapter Four and interpreted in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Report of Findings**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In case study you should be able to ‘hear the sound of voices’  
(Thomas 2011, p. 7).

Acting as a facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction, it was essential that I ensured that ‘participants’ voices [were not] silenced, disengaged or marginalised’ (Creswell 2012, p. 285). On the contrary, participants were to be encouraged ‘to speak for themselves’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 290). The participants in this study were very articulate. In the light of this and in seeking to provide a thick description of the case, numerous and extensive quotations from the interviewees and from the open-ended questions of the parental questionnaire are presented in the findings of this study. These extensive quotations also provide ‘adequate raw data prior to interpretation so that the readers can consider their own alternative interpretations and make their own generalizations’ (Stake 1995, pp. 87, 102). I am, however, cognisant of ‘the potential patronizing element in the very notion of “giving voice” to others’ (Simons 2009, p. 55). I am also cognisant of the fact that ‘how [stories] are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told ... are really dependent on power...defined by the principle of “nkali”, an Igbo word that that loosely translates to, “to be greater than another”’(Adichie 2009).

Due to the contentious and complex subject matter at the heart of this study, evidence that provided ‘contradictory evidence about a theme’ (Creswell 2012, p. 251) was a key feature of the data. The multiple perspectives within multiple perspectives allowed a rich complex picture (Creswell 2012, p. 18) to emerge. Contrary evidence, contradictions, multiple views and tensions within individual perspectives were reported.

Methods for case study are ‘to learn enough about the case to encapsulate complex meanings into a finite report but to describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can experience these happenings vicariously and draw their own conclusions’ (Stake 2005, p. 450). Although not a key feature of the reporting process, some robust, sharp editing and ‘meaning condensation’, which ‘entails an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations’ (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 205), were necessary to remain within the confines of the structure of this study.

The study was approached with foreshadowed issues that emerged from, my own observations (see Chapter Three, 3.5.1, 3.5.2) an initial overview of Spiritan documentation (Documentary Analysis Phase 1) and literature (Review Phase 1). Questions addressed to all stakeholders focused on the following: 1. The Spiritan core values (Appendix A) i.e. a sense of community, commitment to service, concern/option for the poor, high educational standards and personal and faith development). The Spiritan core values were chosen as they encapsulate the identity, ethos and mission of Spiritan schools. 2. Fee charging schools in Irish society: educational inequality and social class division, the lack of diversity within these schools and the corresponding need for bursaries/scholarship, payment of teachers’ salaries by the state). These issues were chosen as they represent the widely documented criticisms of fee charging schools in the public domain. 3. The possibility of fee charging Spiritan schools entering the non-fee charging sector (as proposed in Spiritan Chapter 2012). 4. The proposed changes to the Admissions’ Bill (Government of Ireland 2014).

While not a priori themes for analysis, these questions provided a fluid structure for data collection and analysis. As data were coded and analysed (see Chapter three) these questions were refined and emerged as major and minor sub-themes. Other minor sub-themes which evolved in data collection and analysis were subsumed into major themes (e.g. Figure 3.1). Bearing in mind the iterative nature of the research methodology employed in this study, the major themes and their minor sub-themes were developed both deductively and inductively. Each of the themes was tested against the data and further sub-themes emerged. In the final reporting of the data all the major and minor themes which emerged were reported with the following

exceptions. As the decision was taken by the Spiritans (2015) not to enter their fee charging schools into the Free Scheme, this theme was no longer relevant. Though briefly referred to (5.3.3) data relating to this theme were excluded from the final report of the findings. In addition to this, as there were no developments (post 2013) in relation to the Admissions' Bill (Government of Ireland 2014) exploration of this theme was limited and data relating to this theme, though not entirely excluded from the study (5.3.1) are not reported in this chapter.

The major themes and minor sub-themes that emerged are outlined in this chapter. The final set of major and minor themes presented in this study represent *a* report as opposed to *the* report of findings.

## **4.2 Major Theme 1: Spiritan Mission in Second-Level Fee Charging Spiritan Schools: a Community Enterprise**

The Ethos Appraisal (2015) describes the 'strong desire' among parents and school management for Spiritan schools to retain and to develop their Spiritan identity and cites the strong sense of community, and commitment to Spiritan mission, among all the stakeholders in Spiritan schools (Ethos Committee 2015, pp. 8–11). This major theme can best be understood when reflected on through the lens of two minor themes. These minor themes are as follows; Minor Theme 1: Strong sense of community; Minor Theme 2: Commitment to sustain and develop Spiritan mission.

### **4.2.1 Minor Theme 1: Strong sense of community, '*we are not schools we are communities*' (P3)**

The motto of the Spiritans is 'One Heart and One Soul' (cor unum et anima una). The Spiritan founders 'expressed their sense of community living, with shared meals, prayer and work' (DEA 2011, p. 6). Historically within Spiritan schools, 'a strong bond developed over time between priests, brothers, prefects and fellow staff members, and with students' (DEA 2013, p. 2). Today, 'a sense of community is nourished and nurtured in all ... relationships and school activities among the school community, thus creating a family spirit' (DEA 2011, p. 6). A sense of community

was, according to the Ethos Appraisal (2015), ‘the core value most frequently recognised by management and staff, students and parents as giving expression to their experience of the school to which they belong’. The document continues: ‘Spiritan schools are more than “9.00am to 4.00pm” operations as they play a large part in the life of students and staff and, often times, their families as well’ (DEA 2015, p. 28).

Spiritan schools are characterised by active past pupils’ unions (Harrington and Cox 2009) and parents’ associations (Semple 2009). In relation to one Spiritan college, the past pupils’ union sees its role as ‘a buttress of support’ for the college and is eager to see the college maintained as a ‘Catholic Missionary School’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 37). The Ethos Appraisal (2015, p.10) also drew attention to the fact that many of the current principals and deputies:

... are former teachers and in some cases, former students of Spiritan schools [who] experienced at close quarters the working of Spiritans in positions they now hold [and who] benefited greatly from an apprenticeship that resulted in them, along with other senior members of staff, becoming, to parody the phrase *‘Níos Gaelaí ná na Gaeil iad féin’* ‘more Spiritan than the Spiritans themselves’.

All principals emphasised the strong sense of community within their schools. In this regard P3 stated, ‘rather than call it [name] school I keep saying to students it is [name] community because I believe it’s very, very important that kids have a sense of belonging to a community’. P2 also stressed the importance of ‘realising your strengths, your limitations, recognising those of others and being happy for others when they do well ... being able to share in their achievement’. Immersion projects were identified by principals, patron representative and parents as community endeavours involving students, their families, staff, management and past pupils’ unions.

The importance of tradition and close community ties within the Spiritan family were also recurring themes in the parental responses. The strength of Spiritan schools lies in ‘the strong partnership which has been created between the parents, priests and teachers in the best interests of the boys’ educational, spiritual and physical development’ and in ‘the trust, warmth, friendship and support between parents’ which are ‘amazing’ (PT 24/4). Spiritan schools ‘are a community living in

communities teaching children to care for each other and for the people in their world' (PT 22/32). Teachers and pupils in Spiritan schools 'continually do a lot of work for charitable causes' (PT 22/86) and the Spiritan community 'give back in so many ways to our community as well as the third world countries where they run their missions' (PT 22/160). The help that the community (students, teachers, families) involved in fee charging Spiritan schools give to the poor in raising awareness and funds in the many charity endeavours is, according to one parent, 'very much overlooked' (PT 22/19). There is 'a bond that exists among the past pupils of these colleges' (PT 23/172) and the past pupil alumni is 'strong, vibrant and organised' (PT 24/9). One parent remarked:

I feel in today's society more than any time in the past, the Spiritan school creates a sense of community for the boys. The sense of belonging to a society and accountability to that society will be such a resource to them as they go through life (and I don't mean that on a material level). (PT 24/43)

#### **4.2.2 Minor Theme 2: Commitment to sustain and develop Spiritan mission**

The inculcation and preservation of a strong, vibrant Spiritan identity in Spiritan schools was historically ensured by the large numbers of Spiritan priests and brothers who, in their varied roles within the schools (from teaching, ancillary, administrative to management), acted as a living witness to Spiritan mission (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 4). All principals interviewed for this study were respectful of the enormous contribution made by the significant numbers of 'on the ground' Spiritans who historically 'have been very obvious, very visual to us and so they have been intrinsically tied with the school because of that' (P1).

Principals were acutely cognisant of, and drew attention to, the dwindling presence of Spiritan personnel. We have, according to Principal 4 'come full cycle ... the staff would have originally been all Spiritan Fathers, now we don't actually have a Spiritan priest working on staff other than providing liturgy on demand'. Parents also referred to this absence of 'on the ground' personnel and spoke of it in terms of loss. One parent remarked, 'we are witnessing the loss of religious priests, brothers and nuns. We, the lay people, have to take up the mantle, and lead. Everyone needs a leader, and we all need religion' (PT 24/14).



Principals spoke of the challenge they, as leaders in their schools, faced in ensuring that the Spiritan identity of their schools does not ‘fade away’ (P1) and in bearing witness to Spiritan mission. There was a palpable awareness among principals of their responsibility for the sustenance and active promotion of Spiritan mission. P4 stated:

We would see ourselves rooted very much in the past and in the Spiritan ideals and the mission that they would have espoused ... we have valued that tradition and that past. We draw on it for inspiration ... we would see ourselves as being very much in the Spiritan tradition. We cherish it and we promote it, almost on a daily basis.

All principals expressed their commitment to embrace this challenge guided by the original charisms of the Spiritan founders and with the support of their boards of management and the school trustees. In this regard P5 stated:

I think our role now is to ... remember our heritage, to live out our tradition, to live our lives in the context of the Spiritan way of life and I would see that as a very normal part of the development of a healthy organisation. ... It does need the guidance of its founders. It needs the expertise of its founders. It needs the patronage and the trusteeship of its founders.

Asserting his hope in the future of Spiritan mission in second-level schools, the provincial, in his *Address to the Spiritan Education Trust Senior Leadership Conference*, stated ‘the actual presence of Spiritan religious will diminish but not I hope the mission and faith commitment of our schools’ (Whelan 2016).

The PR also affirmed the continuity of Spiritan mission within Spiritan schools, stating that, ‘the initial clientele would have changed but the mission would have remained the same which was to invite people to participate in what is the mission of the Spiritans’.

The Spiritan Rule of Life ‘enjoins on all engaged in Spiritan Mission to maintain close contact with each other and to have a collective responsibility for the mission’ (SRL 36, cited in Ethos Committee 2015, p. 13). Continuation of Spiritan education is ‘sustained by significant collaboration between Management and Staff at the individual school level’ (ibid., p. 10). Spiritan documentation clearly indicates that ‘Spiritans Schools, as participants in Spiritan mission, are part of the great unfolding

of God's plan for the building together of a more just world where the rights and dignity of each person are of paramount importance' (ibid., p. 26). All Spiritan schools 'are acquainted with and give support to the work of SPIRASI in Ireland and a number of Spiritan missions overseas' (ibid., p. 23).

Parents also affirmed their support for the sustenance of Spiritan identity and identified Spiritan mission as the heart of school life. In response to the open-ended questions of the parental survey questionnaire (Q. 22 and Q. 23), parents consistently alluded to the importance of the Spiritan mission of service in fee charging Spiritan schools. The role Spiritan schools play in undertaking Spiritan mission is evidenced in the following parental responses:

Actions by the Spiritan community, including past pupils' associations, and individual initiatives by past pupils, in Ireland and worldwide, bear testimony to the Spiritan ethos of service and giving of oneself to those less advantaged, both in terms of time and materially. (PT 22/29)

Our fees help fund activities [and] the work of [the] Spiritan community abroad. The school community support[s] schools and projects abroad. A spirit of giving and supporting others is instilled in the boys' education. In the light of fraud amongst a lot of charities recently, I feel confident in giving to the school charities-I feel there is less risk of misappropriation of money which has been fund-raised. (PT 22/95)

However, whilst there is 'a strong sense in each school that the present generation of staff and students follow in a tradition that is well established' (Ethos Committee 2015, pp. 13–14), and findings suggest a strong commitment to preserving Spiritan identity and sustaining Spiritan mission, caution may be required in estimating the importance of Spiritan patronage of the school to parents as evidenced in Figure 4.1.

#### 14. The fact that the school is under the management of a religious denomination (i.e. the Spiritans)

(306 responses)

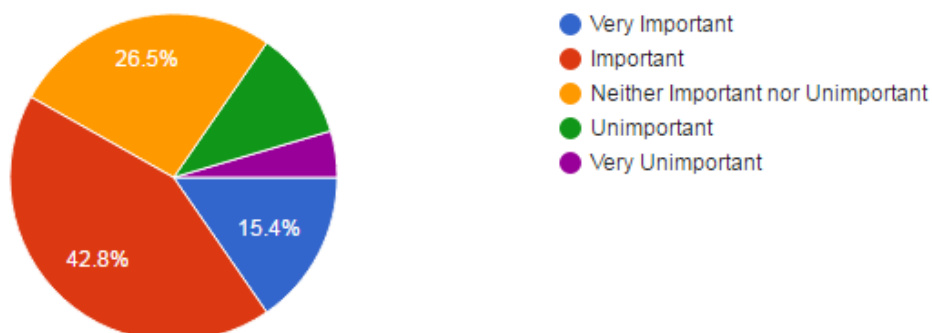


Figure 4.1 Parental Responses to Q. 14

In addition to this, some parents expressed reservation in relation to the emphasis placed on Spiritan mission as part of the educational enterprise of fee charging Spiritan schools as indicated in the following parental responses:

Certainly the school does a lot of good work and encourages the boys to be aware of those less fortunate than themselves and this is admirable. However the school primarily exists to provide educational services to boys whose parents have the means to send them to a fee paying school. (PT22/10)

Day to day running of the school necessitates concentrating mainly on the education of the present school cohort. (PT 23/198)

The responses of the principals also echoed the sentiment that the primary mission of school is the holistic development of its students. In response to the question ‘what would you regard as the main objective of your school?’ P4 stated that it was to ‘offer a service over six years, to give as broad a range of educational experience as we possibly can’ and P5 remarked:

In our day-to-day work ... like all schools we would focus on the academic ... on the extra-curricular and the development of the whole person and in our particular tradition we would focus on life in the Spirit, which is both the faith development of the students and also the awareness and the consciousness of the students of others, of other issues.

### **4.3 Major Theme 2: Fee Charging Spiritan Schools Serving the Poor?**

There are, as outlined in Chapter Two of this study, many interpretations of the term ‘poverty’. The complex major theme ‘service of the poor’ is best understood when addressed through the lens of three minor themes. These minor themes are as follows: serving the materially poor, serving the poor through encounter and serving other types of poverty e.g. serving the ‘New Poor’.

#### **4.3.1 Minor Theme 1: Serving the materially poor; an uneasy tension**

It is unsurprising that the apparent ‘paradox’ (Whelan 2016), which is Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools, leads to unease as evidenced in the following observation made by the PR:

In this juncture, we still have the challenge and we have to live with the tension between what we say we stand for and what perhaps we are doing and the anomalies that exist in that sort of tension. So being able to live with tension is a big challenge, it’s a challenge for the Spiritans themselves.

Parents also acknowledged that it is ‘not particularly easy to reconcile the Spiritan vocation with the running of fee-paying schools’ (PT 22/65). One parent described this tension in the following way:

In the ideal world there would be no need for fee-paying schools. As a parent who wants the best for their sons I think that [school name] provides a better education than non-fee paying alternatives, mainly in providing better facilities and extra-curricular activities that can be more finely tailored to individual needs. However, I am certainly conflicted because I can’t see how schools only accessed by those with money are not somehow undermining the ideal of equality for all ... From my understanding of the Spiritan ethos, in-so-far as it follows the gospel message, I would feel that it would be more compatible with providing free education to those less well off than providing a privileged education to more affluent families. (PT 24/16)

##### **4.3.1.1 Do fee charging Spiritan schools serve the poor?**

When presented with the question as to whether or not fee charging Spiritan schools serve the materially poor, opinion was strongly divided among and within participant groups. All principals qualified their ‘yes’ responses. The patron representative, whose initial response was an unequivocal ‘no’, later acknowledged the importance

of fundraising, service learning experiences (e.g. immersion projects), development education and access programmes as significant initiatives in developing the Spiritan mission of fee charging schools in serving the poor (see 4.3.1.2). Principals also acknowledged the initiatives as outlined by the PR but, aware of the lack of social diversity among their student body, qualified their ‘yes’ responses (see 4.3.1.2). In terms of parental responses, opinion was clearly divided as evidenced in Figure 4.2.

## 21. "Fee-paying Spiritan schools serve the poor" (306 responses)

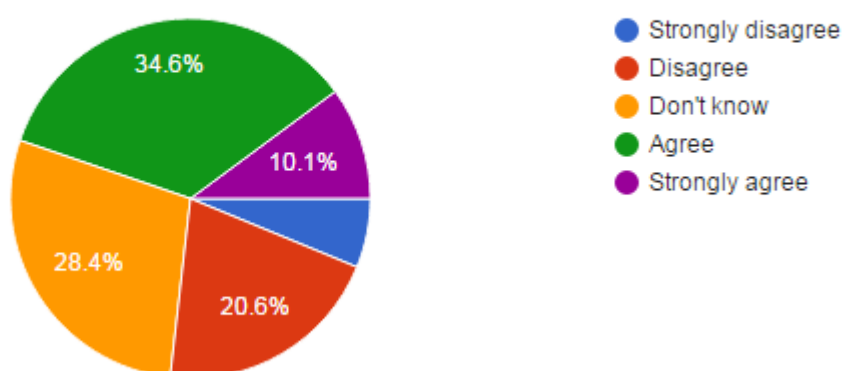


Figure 4.2 Parental Responses to Q. 21

When asked to elaborate on their response to Q.21 responses to the following open-ended question (Q. 22) revealed a more detailed and complex tapestry of responses (see Table 4.1).

Parental responses Total	Definite Yes	Definite No	Qualified Yes	Qualified No	Unsure	Don't know	Question unclear*	Misc.
202	113	23	20	12	10	12	9	3
100%	56%	11%	10%	6%	5%	6%	5%	1%

Table 4.1 Analysis of Parental Responses to Q. 22

## **Analysis of participant responses**

### **(i) Unclear question/statement**

While it is recommended as a given that survey questions are clear (Creswell 2012, p. 389), the decision not to clarify the term ‘the poor’ or ‘service’ was a deliberate one. I wanted parents to make their own interpretation of it. Some responses drew attention to, and in some cases were understandably critical of, the lack of clarity\* (see Table 4.1) with which the question was posed. The statement was, according to one parent, ‘very general, not sure who exactly are the “poor”, and how any school might especially “serve” them’ (PT 22/56). Another parent remarked, ‘is raising money the same as service?’ (PT 22/110). The following comments were also made:

I’m not sure whether this statement means that children of people with less income can attend the college. They would find it very difficult. If it means that the school educates their students to be socially aware and work to improve the rights and opportunities for less well-off people then I believe it does. (PT 22/41)

While I’m honestly not happy with the term ‘the poor’, I am conscious that very few economically-disadvantaged students attend fee-paying Spiritan schools (or any other fee-paying schools, except, possibly, Belvedere College) in Ireland. (PT 22/72)

### **(ii) Definite ‘No’ ‘Can’t pay, can’t go’ (PT 22/142)**

Twenty-three parents responded with a definite ‘no’. ‘Only the children of the wealthy or parents who are willing to stretch themselves financially can’, according to one parent, ‘avail of fee-paying schools’ (PT 24/31), which are ‘too expensive for children from financially poor families to attend and don’t have enough scholarships in place to provide access’ (PT 22/17). There is ‘no evidence that they serve anyone other than those who pay their fees. If you cannot pay the fees, your child cannot go there’ (PT 22/103). Fee charging Spiritan schools ‘serve the community who send their children to such schools. The host community tend[s] to be upper/middle-class. Ergo, they do not primarily serve the poor’ (PT 22/201). The PR stated, ‘we have to be straight – they don’t! [serve the poor] ... we gloss it up in lots of ways but if you look at the schools and you look at the type of education and what’s available to the young people who come to our schools... they don’t’.

### **(iii) Qualified ‘No’**

Other parents (12), while disagreeing with the proposition, qualified their ‘no’ responses by emphasising the positive contribution made by fee charging Spiritan schools in terms of fundraising. A fee charging Spiritan school ‘hardly serves the poor however the charity side of school is excellent’ (PT 22/176). Whilst acknowledging that students attending fee charging schools are from families ‘that have disposable income thus “poorer families” cannot attend’, this parent goes on to state that s/he is, however, ‘aware that the school encourage students to contribute to charity e.g. Christmas tree sales for St Vincent de Paul, Goal etc.’ (PT 22/12).

### **(v) Qualified ‘Yes’**

Twenty parents (and all principals) qualified their affirmative statements. One parent commented, ‘I agree in so far as they fundraise for the poor and other charitable activities, and they also raise awareness amongst the students about the marginalised groups in Irish society and indeed globally’ (PT 22/37). Spiritan schools ‘serve the poor in Africa, [but] I’m not sure how they serve the poor in Ireland, other than TY projects’ (PT 22/60). Another parent remarked that Spiritan schools, ‘serve the poor through charitable acts rather than inclusiveness in the education’ (PT 22/34).

### **(vi) ‘Yes’**

One hundred and thirteen participants responded with a definite ‘yes’. The following direct quotations from parents provide a flavour of the affirmative responses: ‘Spiritans schools create a culture of charity among the boys. There is a big emphasis on charitable activities such as St. Vincent de Paul and African charity work’ (PT 22/21); ‘There are continuous projects ongoing in the school which not only provide financial and other assistance to the poor but also make our children aware of what’s going on outside their own bubble’ (PT 22/52); ‘Spiritans schools show their pupils from an early stage by their example the importance of charitable works, this experience hopefully forms an important and ongoing part of the pupils lives’ (PT 22/61); ‘My sons have been engaged in numerous fund raising activities for SVP. It is very important that children are aware that there are many people less fortunate and strive to lead by example and help others’ (PT 22/96).

In response to the question, ‘do fee charging schools serve the poor?’ findings from this study indicate a broad spectrum of opinion both among and within the stakeholder groups. Findings also reveal a rich tapestry of perceptions among participants in relation to the manner in which service of the poor is manifested in fee charging Spiritan schools.

#### **4.3.1.2 Participant perceptions: Serving the poor through (i) Raising money (ii) Raising awareness (iii) Raising critical questions**

Service of the poor, can, according to the findings of this study, be perceived and conceived of as a continuum. At one end of the continuum lies a focus on fundraising only; at the other end lies an emphasis on stringent social analysis with the implied commitment to act for a more equal world. Mediating between the two ends of the continuum lies the raising of awareness of both the privileged position occupied by students in accessing the advantages of a ‘quality fee charging Spiritan education’ (PT 22/168), and the ‘plight’ (PT 23/198) of those who, through poverty, lack access to the world’s resources.

A summary of the parental perceptions of the manner in which fee charging Spiritan schools serve the poor is illustrated in Table 4.2.

Total parental responses	Service through Fundraising (only)	Service through Fundraising and Awareness of privilege and plight	Service through Stringent social analysis to create a more equal society	Other e.g. through scholarships
153	78	56	6	13

Table 4.2: Analysis of ways in which Spiritan schools serve the poor



**(i) Raising money**

All principals and the patron representative acknowledged fundraising as a worthwhile activity engaged in within their schools. In relation to the younger cohort of students for whom participation in a more encounter-based programme was inappropriate, fundraising was regarded as a key expression of serving the poor. In this regard Principal 1 stated: ‘we aspire to something that we hope they might do as grown-ups because the changes that they can effect when they are 15 or 16 is only fundraising. They are not going to be going on UNHCR missions with Angelina Jolie. They might when they are 40, then they’ll be thrilled.’

Parents lauded the outstanding ‘charitable causes here in Ireland and abroad’ (PT 22/59; 22/86) and the ‘constant fundraisers done to support local charities and charities associated with the Spiritan congregation’ (PT 22/43) such as ‘St Vincent De Paul, Goal, Aidlink, and the foreign missions’ (PT 22/53; 22/63; 22/135). Parents highly commended the inculcation of a charitable disposition in their children who ‘from the moment [they] enter the school are involved in a number of charitable organisations’ (PT 22/194) and fundraising activities 22/21; 22/28), and commented on how they ‘learn to give back to society’ (PT 23/3; 22/149; 23/33; 23/97; 23/147).

**(ii) Raising awareness**

Findings from the parental questionnaire also suggest that, through raising awareness of their child’s privilege and the plight of others who are ‘less fortunate’, fee charging Spiritan schools can serve the poor. Spiritan fee charging schools encourage their students to reach out and help others, thereby nurturing a charitable disposition and serving the poor. Spiritan schools ‘provide a constant framework to remind students of their privileged position and encourage an ethos of giving something back to the community’ (PT 22/200). They ‘educate their students to be aware of their positions of privilege in comparison to others’ (PT 22/202), and ‘constantly remind’ their students of the need to help others less fortunate than themselves (PT 22/27; 22/50; 22/177; 23/143).

One parent stated:

Although privileged to be attending [school name] I feel my sons have had their eyes opened to the less fortunate in the world and have been encouraged to give of themselves and help out in so many ways from delivering food to the very disadvantaged in our own city during which they see the poverty that exists first hand to building and helping on the missions. Not forgetting all that happens in between. (PT 22/155)

Principals indicated a change in terms of the priority and emphasis given to fundraising in their schools and drew attention to a significant shift in emphasis from raising money to raising awareness of poverty. Principal 1 remarked; ‘to what extent is concern for the poor promoted? It’s awareness, it’s conversations in class, its discussions.’

### **(iii) Raising critical questions**

Principal 5, while acknowledging ‘fundraising as a crucial means of raising awareness’ accepted ‘that you need to be careful that it doesn’t become an end in itself.’ The patron representative also emphasised the need to maintain a tension between raising money and raising critical questions in remaining faithful to the Spiritan service of the poor. He stated:

A social consciousness takes many forms and for young children in particular one way of getting a handle and an awareness of issues of inequality is through fundraising but fundraising can be self-defeating at a certain level if it doesn’t come with a sense of awareness-building of the causes of poverty and where we stand in relationship to that ... so while fundraising is necessary and good, you need the Mother Teresa approach – which is the fundraising – but you also need the Helder Camara approach – which is asking the question ‘why?’ Why do these situations exist and how can we go about changing those realities? So, being very successful at fundraising can be a bit of a conscience-solver and on its own, it is not sufficient. It is not sufficient without a kind of stringent social analysis. It’s good that our schools have very good, very successful fundraising activities but if it doesn’t go hand in hand with social awareness and social analysis and a grasp of what Catholic social teaching is asking for them I think we are missing the boat.

The PR's statement seemed to advocate the full continuum of service. A similar sentiment was echoed by Principal 4:

Years ago, [we] would have been world champions at fundraising! It's the easy option. As a staff and as a group looking at the promotion of the ethos in the college and the promotion of critical thinkers and independent learners and taking boys away from the easy ask of raising money and passing it on without any major reflective practices on the boys we have, we purposely looked at maybe less fund raising and more reflective practice.

In response to Q. 22, a small number of parents advocated the raising of critical questions and commitment to addressing structural injustice in serving the poor. One parent stated, 'the ethos propagated by the school is one of social justice and in that case I believe that the graduates will contribute to a more egalitarian society' (PT 22/88). Another stated, 'society needs empowered, educated young people to bring about change for the better at all levels. This, I perceive, is one of the most important goals of a Spiritan education' (PT 22/202).

#### **4.3.1.3 Age-appropriate education for social justice and a bias in the research**

It is, however, important to acknowledge that education for social justice, like all education, must be age appropriate. All principals and the PR were cognisant of the need for an 'age appropriate' approach to serving the materially poor:

All education has to be age appropriate ... it has to be at a level that the [students] can engage with and can benefit from so pastoral placements like you would have in Transition Year, where they would spend time can be very beneficial. All the other social outreach things, no matter what form they are, the homework clubs that exist ... all of those things are very beneficial and they need to be part of the culture and consciousness of each school. (PR)

For younger students (Junior school students and second-level Junior Cycle students), serving the poor centres primarily on awareness-raising actions (guest speakers, debate, etc.) and fundraising. For older students, engagement of a more 'personal' and 'hands-on' nature in the form of service learning, immersion projects and raising critical questions was actively promoted in addition to the actions

considered appropriate for younger students. The issue of the age-appropriate nature of serving the poor and its potential bias in relation to the parental responses (increased bias towards raising money and awareness and corresponding bias away from social analysis) must be acknowledged.

### **4.3.2 Minor Theme 2: Serving the poor through encounter**

As observed in Chapter Two, encounter with the poor is a key element of the church's understanding of service. In this study this theme is observed primarily through the provision of opportunities for service through immersion projects and pastoral placements.

#### **4.3.2.1 Immersion projects**

##### **(i) 'Trade-off' (P1) or 'transformation' (P4)?**

All principals and the patron representative spoke with great enthusiasm about the immersion projects undertaken in Spiritan schools and regarded them as a real manifestation of the 'new Spiritan mission' (P4). These trips were described as potential 'life-changing' (PR), 'amazing transformative'(P4) experiences, which moved students out of their comfort zones and which promoted a kind of catharsis which inspired a desire to give back. Spiritan documentation also affirms the importance of these immersion projects as vehicles for Spiritan mission (see Chapter Two).

In response to the criticism that these immersion projects could be viewed as voyeuristic and representing a type of 'mission tourism', Principal 1 drew attention to the 'necessary evil' that these trips were, stating:

I think when push comes to shove if we can hand a charity, or a group, a cheque for €30,000 and say 'This is going to educate those five kids' or those 20 kids ... or take them out of prostitution or off the streets ... and the only way they can do that is if ten of ours go for a week on a bus and gawp out the window. It's the trade-off. Ours won't give unless they can look out the window and it's only a week so the extent to which it can interfere or cause any damage to the projects that are going on in places like Calcutta is limited.

## **(ii) Differing models of immersion projects**

In discussion with the principals, a variation in the practice of immersion projects was revealed. According to the first model, the students were seen primarily as benefactors who ‘raise money and go and see where the money is being spent and what it is being used for’ (P2). According to this model, students ‘go to work on projects, to make an impact and to leave a mark’ (P2). The emphasis in the second model is more on encounter:

Students do a level of fundraising but ... they don’t have any say in how the funds are dispensed because the ethos of the immersion is that when they are in the developing world, they are there as guests, ... they are not there as benefactors ... they are sitting in a class with 50 African kids, an African teacher and there is no doubt who the boss is in that situation. They are the ones who stand out, they are the ones who are being teased about their colour, about their accent, about the things that they have, about the way that they think. They are the ones that are being challenged. That has the potential to be transformative. (P5)

The patron representative also drew attention to tension between the two models of immersion, stating:

I still think there is probably a little too much focus on money and what we can give rather than how we can be changed through the experience of encounter. The basic, through the ministry of Jesus, was ... encounter and every encounter with Jesus was a transformation. One of our schools in particular would do things like the [students] attending school for a week or two weeks in an overseas place and sharing the way of life and having to go through a bit of that. I think that can be quite transformative.

### **4.3.2.2 Pastoral placements**

Those who follow in the footsteps of des Places were ‘to enter into the world of the poor and lead a simple lifestyle’ (DEA 2015, p. 36; Koren 1983, p. 14). In seeking to shed light on the manner in which their schools serve the poor, principals, patron representative and parents drew attention to the active engagement of their students/children, at an age-appropriate level, with a variety of people representative of groups who, though not necessarily ‘destitute’ (Koren 1983, p. 14), are poor in the sense that they face difficult life challenges, e.g. the elderly or those with particular

needs. Principals perceived pastoral placement programmes that sought to raise awareness and to promote encounter as a key means of bearing witness to the Spiritan mission of serving the poor.

Through engagement ‘with people with profound intellectual and educational disabilities, people who are elderly ... but who have huge problems’ (P1), students’ eyes are opened, and through their ‘more active role’ (P4) they are forced ‘out of their comfort zone’ (P1) and become aware of their ‘Christian, Catholic, Spiritan duty’ (P2) to create a more equal society. Parents also affirmed the need for, and importance of, a more ‘hands-on way in helping those less fortunate’ (PT 22/137). One parent questioned ‘how effective VDP and soup runs that give the appearance of reaching out to poor in fact are’, favouring instead ‘pastoral placements’ (PT 22/129).

The Ethos Appraisal (2015, p. 19) states that ‘a well organised social outreach programme ought to be a constitutive part of Transition Year. These involve the placement of students over a period of time in a community service role with such groups as disadvantaged youth, elderly people, and homeless people’. The patron representative affirmed the need for sharing lives and encounter, stating, ‘education isn’t petrol pump based ...[it] isn’t input based but rather a sharing of the knowledge, recognising the dignity and the value and the knowledge that is present in the people that you are working with’ (PR).

### **4.3.3 Minor Theme 3: Serving the ‘new’ poor**

The proposal that fee charging Catholic and Spiritan schools serve different types of poverty in different ways, as discussed in Chapter Two, emerged as a key finding in this study and will now be addressed.

#### **4.3.3.1 Perceiving other types of poverty**

While opinion was divided on the issue as to whether or not fee charging schools serve the materially poor, there was a clear acknowledgement among participants that fee charging schools address other types of poverty. Principal 3 referred to other types of poverty that manifest themselves in fee charging Spiritan schools, stating, ‘sometimes with the everyday pressures of Irish society moving forward, emotional,

social, family support, family units, all this type of area is breaking down.’ Parental responses echoed this. Money, according to one parent, ‘is only one aspect of poverty, there is poor in spirit, health, mental health and social poverty ... It is important to recognise that one may be financially well-off but in dire poverty in other aspects of life’ (PT 22/194). Another parent raised the question, ‘how do we define poor these days. Intellectually poor, financially poor???’ (PT 22/39).

#### **4.3.3.2 Serving the ‘spiritually’ poor**

Whilst clearly acknowledging that ‘there are many kinds of poverty’ (DEA 2015, p. 38), ‘spiritual poverty’ (DEA 2015, p. 38) emerged as the most cited type of poverty (other than material poverty) among participants. Findings from the Ethos Appraisal suggest ‘varying levels of religious practice among staff and students in each school’ (Ethos Appraisal 2015, p. 11). Spiritan documentation states, ‘at a time when traditional Catholic values are under scrutiny the school provides a supportive environment for the inculcation of gospel values’ (DEA 2015, p. 38).

Principals also emphasised the role the schools play in addressing spiritual poverty by acting as the new parish (P2):

The school is [the students’] parish ... The idea of a poverty of spirit isn’t just financial and economic, there is a real poverty of spirit, of Christian conscience within the middle-classes, in Ireland ... Now, if we have [students] here, who leave in May for the summer holidays, what percentage would go to mass or would be in a church unless it was for a funeral or a wedding or some major social occasion before they come back in September? Will it be 20, 25%, would it even be as high as 30%? ... Getting them to realise that there is real meaning and real value in the service to Jesus Christ and it comes through these schools.

This sentiment was echoed by Principal 4:

There is a very strong argument to say that the mission of our schools isn’t just about materialism but that there is a spiritual poverty that has to be addressed in a lot of these people as well. You might be very materialistically well off but spiritually there might be a deficit and that’s, I suppose, assisted with students in school engaging with various spiritual and religious practices that perhaps they might not necessarily get at home.

The PR concurred stating, ‘people are poor at a certain level who have not heard the Gospel, who have not encountered Jesus, who have not heard the great wonder of what church and sacramental life can be to you in your life’. Whilst acknowledging ‘that there is a sense that all are poor who know their need of God’, the PR, however, also clearly stated:

in the Gospel and liberation theology ... it has been made explicitly clear for us and [Pope] Francis [we] would also make it clear that those who have least of the world’s resources, who experience least the blessing of God that is available on this planet, are those who are most poor.

Parental responses relating to the importance of the provision of a Christian/Catholic education are discussed in 4.5.1.5

#### **4.4 Major Theme 3: Diversity within Fee Charging Spiritan Schools**

Whilst there is a diversity of services provided by the Spiritans in Ireland, there has been a notable lack of diversity in terms of the schools for which the Spiritans have been responsible, catering almost exclusively for the materially wealthy (Keating 2006). The type of diversity addressed in this study is social diversity. Changes with regard to the social structure of fee charging Spiritan schools are being considered if not implemented, e.g. the introduction of scholarship programmes (Whelan 2016; Ethos Committee 2015). This major theme can best be understood when reflected on through the lens of the two minor themes, namely; a commitment to increasing social diversity in principle, and; diversity of financial circumstances of those ‘within’ the school community.

##### **4.4.1. Minor Theme 1: a commitment to increasing social diversity in principle**

As observed in Chapter Two the Spiritans have expressed their commitment to increasing social diversity within their schools. There was broad consensus among participants in this study that access programmes should be introduced. In this regard the PR stated, ‘whatever resources we have are at the service of those who need them most ... it is a much better model of education than just being educated with the people from your street, your club, your political party and whatever. It enables questions and understandings of life to get focused.’



Parents also emphasised that they ‘would welcome allocation of spaces to pupils from disadvantaged areas’ (PT 22/45) and expressed the desire for ‘an intake of non-fee-paying students ... to create a mix of students from different backgrounds’ (PT 24/5).

#### **4.4.1.1. Bursaries and scholarships: current practice**

Findings from this study suggest that, in terms of bursaries, practice between Spiritan schools varies. The one constant, however, is that the overall provision of bursaries and scholarships is low. Two schools did not have any scholarship programme in operation for students outside the school. Three schools had two or three each. In terms of selection criteria, one school has an academic scholarship programme based on an exam held in Spring each year whereby one full scholarship is awarded to the top aggregate performer in Irish, English and Maths and half-scholarships are awarded to the next three top performers. One school provided third-level subsistence grants for students leaving a local disadvantaged school, which provides an opportunity for them to access third-level education. Scholarships for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were not widely available. Three schools have had a small number of social integration scholarships over the years, funded by the HSE (Health Service Executive) and/or the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

There was a lack of clarity among parents with regard to the system/or lack thereof currently in place in fee charging Spiritan schools. Parents ‘are not aware of scholarships given to students coming from poor families’ (PT 22/134). One parent stated, ‘I don’t know if the school gives scholarships’ (PT 22/121) and another remarked ‘although I would assume that the student body in the school includes pupils on a scholarship I am not aware of any particular policy [school name] has in relation to providing access to the school for pupils who may not be in a position, for whatever reason, to meet the fee requirements currently set by the school’ (PT 22/13). ‘The number of free/part funded has not’, according to another parent, ‘been communicated to me’, (PT 22/150).

Acutely cognisant of the lack of representation of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, some parents expressed their ‘disappointment’ (PT 22/169) at the lack of programmes (PT 22/10) or policies ‘of bursaries for less affluent children without the means to pay fees’ (PT 22/118) currently in place.

#### **4.4.1.2 Reaction to a social integration model**

Strong support for a social integration/diversity model of access, as operated in Belvedere College, was voiced among participants. Principals were ‘very impressed by the Belvedere model’ (P5), which ‘is incredibly well intentioned and ... absolutely gives people opportunities that they wouldn’t have’ (P1). The Belvedere model has ‘been a challenge to all of us to look at our own systems’ (P4) and principals have ‘had conversations around this ... looked very closely at it ... examined it, the costings of it, the funding of it, the integration of the students, the selection of the students and how they managed it’ (P2). Parents were also very impressed by the Belvedere programme of social integration (PT 22/7; 22/10; 22/169; 24/5), ‘not rugby’ scholarships (PT 22/57).

Findings, however, indicated a preference for social integration to be approached in a discreet manner. Referring to current and past practice of scholarships in his/her school, Principal 3 remarked, ‘the funding of it was by a past pupil who wanted to give somebody from an impoverished background the opportunity that they had but the whole condition of the thing was anonymity’. Principal 2 echoed this sentiment stating:

In relation to the current practice, students availing of scholarships are not advertised. We have about three or four students in [school name] at the moment and it’s very confidential, not all their fellow students know ... we don’t use the term scholarships. They are here. I think labelling students and being a scholarship student is a mistake. They are here, they are part of the school community.

In relation to the introduction of an access programme the patron representative also emphasised that ‘it has to be discreet! I suppose that’s always the thing. We can’t become relevant. We can’t become, I suppose “sexy”, for want of a better word on the back of other people ... we don’t usually blow our trumpet’. In relation to

publicity surrounding the more publicised social integration model, Principal 4 stated, ‘I think it was a bit unsavoury and maybe it’s the kids that didn’t get in that you felt sorry for.’ Echoing this sentiment, one parent remarked, ‘I don’t know if the school gives scholarships or helps out struggling families. Perhaps it is something that should not be publicized’ (PT 22/121).

#### **4.4.1.3 The challenges of implementing a social integration scheme**

While participants were supportive of increased social integration in principle, the practicalities implied in implementing such a programme presented challenges to the principals as instigators of these initiatives. Referring to the commitment of the Spiritan congregation to increasing diversity through access (Chapter 2012; Ethos Committee 2015; DEA 2015), one principal remarked:

I don’t know if they know what they mean by that. I’m not saying I don’t know what they mean – I don’t think they know what they mean about it and then it’s impossible for me to know what they mean about it! (P2)

Although academic scholarships are more ‘clear-cut’ (P1), the type of diversity envisaged by the Spiritans does not imply ‘creaming off’ brighter students from disadvantaged schools (PR). Reservations were expressed with regard to the manner in which social integration should be undertaken. Participants expressed the need for any such schemes to be undertaken slowly, with great sensitivity and in a ‘very progressive ... very viable, deeply thought-out way’ (P3). Careful consideration and examination ‘that if it is being done, it is being done for the benefit of students and not for the benefit of the institution’ is, according to P5, essential.

Parents also expressed reservations in relation to the impact of social integration on the student who is being integrated. One parent remarked, ‘I think a student who comes from a different social status may find it difficult to integrate in an environment where there is certainly a lot of wealth’ (PT 22/166). The geographical factor and the fact that ‘the Junior School has a cohort of well off kids who know each other since they were 4 or 5 ... who will go on to attend [school name] together makes integration difficult’ (PT 24/66).

Principal 2 insisted that ‘creaming off’ was a necessity in integrating students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, stating:

Inner city schools have recommended [students] who are very very bright and deserve an opportunity but they are not bright in a middle-class context or a [school name] context. They come in the middle range. They would be top of their school in the inner city but they wouldn’t be otherwise ... For [students] to come from inner city, working class backgrounds, into schools such as the Spiritan schools for their own establishment, for their own self-esteem, their own self-worth, they have to have something to offer and you have to encourage them to develop and grow and they have to have a success and they have to commit to going back into their own community and be a role model. I think that is very important ... why should those kids be denied an opportunity that they may be able to benefit from and fully avail of because they are bright and in the interests of equality that they would encourage ‘maybe we should be taking boys of less talent’ who have absolutely no chance, no chance of surviving in [school name] and therefore you are heaping failure upon failure and you are not giving opportunity for boys to see what can be achieved.

When I probed this response further and asked P2 what fears s/he might have in integrating students of mixed ability from a working class background, P2 stated:

It would be a huge challenge for them to settle – to get involved ... if they are weak academically – as I said to you the top end of those classes are never, or should never be, the top end of ours. If you take somebody from [disadvantaged school name] the kid would want to be an absolute genius if they go in at the top end at [fee charging Spiritan school name].

All principals expressed the need for a template to determine access and selection. In this regard Principals 4 & 5 stated the following;

We have engaged in several occasions certainly over the past ten years to look at the whole idea of scholarships and the proposal to actually do it... We are at a bit of a loss as to the best way to go about it... it's a difficult one to juggle and what's the fairest way to do it ... we are very much in favour of it but we are at a loss as to know how to press the button and activate it. (P4)

It would be interesting if the state were prepared to meet us part of the way or the whole way on that particular issue...as a school we would be interested in developing it and it is that age-old dilemma of how do you maintain your current facilities and make them more accessible outside of financial resources. (P5)

In discussing the form an access programme could take the PR made the following remark:

The schools have been asked to look at how they would develop this, given their own particular circumstances, given their own culture and location and each school is looking at it with their boards of management and staff to see how that might be done in their particular context. We didn't want to initially go with a top-down approach ...we thought it better to be a collaborative approach where the different schools try different things, learn from experience, learn from the experience of other schools that have done it and come up with something that works in their context. Then over time, we would, through monitoring and that, come up with protocols and models.

The provincial also affirmed this trial and error approach to the introduction of an access programme stating:

Each management team is reflecting on access and opening up new and diverse pathways and I think it is for each school to see how this can be achieved in the local context. What we are talking about here, I suggest, is incremental change. Seeing what works best and bringing this about. (Whelan 2016)

#### **4.4.2 Minor Theme 2: Diversity of financial circumstances of those ‘within’ the school community**

*‘To be fair not all our students come to us with a silver spoon in their mouths!’ (P4)*

Participants drew attention to the strong commitment to serve those ‘within’ their schools as the first port of call in terms of service. There was a palpable sense that ‘charity begins at home’. When exploring the bursary systems currently in place, there was consensus among principals that financial support for families of students going through difficult times was central to the Spiritan mission of service. Principal 5 stated, ‘we keep students in the school whose families run into financial difficulties by hook or by crook’ and Principal 4 referred to the ‘system’ the school has ‘whereby people who are in difficulty within the network already in the school ... get a write-off or a write-down of fees ... as part of our mission’. Parents also drew attention to this service ‘within’. Spiritan schools support their pupils if they fall on ‘hard times’ (PT 22/179; 22/181) and there is ‘great support for past pupils residing here and abroad be it financial/spiritual’ (PT 22/36). Findings indicate that ‘middle

class families struggle with these fees too' (PT 22/129), not everyone comes from a 'rich' family (PT 22/80; 23/182; 24/22) and families make significant sacrifices to send their children to fee charging Spiritan schools (PT 24/3; 24/4; 24/18; 24/70). This diversity in relation to the financial circumstances of parents and financial sacrifices made is evidenced in the following response:

It is true that there are a large number of well off families with sons in the school. It is also true to say that a large number of parents with sons in the school who make significant economic sacrifice to send their sons to fee paying schools and in some cases could be considered the 'new poor'. They make the sacrifice as they value education and consider it an investment in their sons' future. (PT 22/107)

Spiritane documentation also makes reference to the considerable sacrifices parents make to send their children to fee charging schools. The Ethos Appraisal (2015, p. 20) states 'School Boards and Parent groups ... point out the many sacrifices middle class families make to provide a Spiritane education for their children'.

#### **4.5 Major Theme 4: The Role of Fee Charging Schools within the Irish Education System**

The Spiritans invited Kathleen Lynch (former Minister of State for Disability, Equality and Mental Health) to one of their Chapter meetings in order to discuss the issue of fee charging schools and the potential role they play in perpetuating educational inequality. The PR remarked that Kathleen Lynch 'stated what her position was, that she wasn't in favour of fee charging education but then she also hit on the historical reality'. In his own words the PR remarked, 'we are a product of a particular history'. Acknowledging 'the difficulty in changing the schools as they are' (PR), Lynch highlighted the 'opportunity and challenge' these schools faced and emphasised their potential 'as vehicles for change and for equality in society' (PR). Major Theme 4 explores the role of fee charging Spiritane schools within the Irish education system'. This major theme is best understood when reflected on through the lens of the following two minor themes; Minor Theme 1: Providing education for transformation and; Minor Theme 2: Perceptions of fee charging schools as contributing to education inequality and social class division.

#### **4.5.1 Minor Theme 1: Providing education for transformation**

So what did I learn from my brief two year encounter as an active participant in the mission of Spiritan education? One thing is that schools are great places. I thoroughly enjoyed my time teaching and working with students. They are places of great potential and transformation. (Whelan 2016)

Findings from the parental survey questionnaire in response to Q. 23 (How do fee charging Spiritan schools provide education for transformation) suggest the following data. A total of 201 responses was recorded. Of the 201 responses recorded 51 parents stated that these schools do not provide education for transformation and 150 parents stated that they do. A further analysis of the 150 affirmative responses revealed that fee charging Spiritan schools provide education for transformation by; providing a broad / holistic education (cited in 105 responses) ; inspiring social responsibility (cited in 87 responses); providing a values-based i.e. Christian/Catholic/Spiritan education (cited in 78 responses); shaping future leaders (cited in 28 responses) ; setting the bar for other (i.e. non-fee charging) schools (cited in 13 responses).

##### **4.5.1.1 Providing a broad holistic education**

There was a strong consensus among the participants in this study that a broad education, rooted in the French liberal model of education (DEA 2015, p. 82), aimed at developing ‘kind and caring young people’ (P3) and ‘promoting the holistic development of students’ (P4), lay at the heart of all educational endeavours in Spiritan schools. Spiritan schools today are ‘respectful of each individual’s personality and talents’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 14). Students in fee charging Spiritan schools are offered ‘as broad a range of educational experience’ as possible (P4) to assist each student to achieve ‘his potential in every way, his academic, his social, his sporting, his physical – a better word I suppose than sporting – and his spiritual’ (P5).

Findings from the parental survey suggest that parents choose fee charging Spiritan schools on the basis of the ‘structured’ (PT 23/162) and ‘broad’ education (PT 23/56; 23/180; 24/19), which focuses ‘on developing ‘well rounded’ (PT 22/143; 23/10; 23/106; 23/123; 23/154; 23/188; 24/19), ‘upstanding, socially minded’ (PT 23/147)

‘good citizens who contribute to a flourishing Irish society’ (PT 23/9). Fee charging Spiritan schools provide ‘real opportunities for children to develop other skills (sport, art, music etc.) which are all part of education’ (PT 23/65).

The reason we chose [school name] for our only son was because we were of the view that the type of education and environment – both in terms of academic opportunity, moral and spiritual guidance and all round approach to education and formation would be the most suited to our son’s personality and intellectual and academic abilities. The hope is that the school (in conjunction with the family) turns out well-rounded young men, with a strong sense of social justice, a sense of identity and loyalty and hopefully a desire to effect change for good as they go through life. In this context one could say that this Spiritan school, through its alumni will impact the evolution of their Ireland (a society which will presumably continue to evolve and transform) in a positive way. (PT 23/10)

#### **4.5.1.2 Promoting academic excellence**

There was a clear consensus among all principals that academic excellence constituted a key objective in their educational mission: ‘like all schools we would focus on the academic’ (P5) and encourage students to ‘be the best they can be’ (P3). Academic excellence was also, according to all principals, a key factor in parents choosing their schools. In this regard, Principal 1 stated, ‘[w]e have to have it academic. The parents aren’t sending them here for joy!’

Parents also emphasised the importance of the ‘pursuit of academic excellence’ (PT 23/58; 23/19; 23/45; 23/128; 23/130; 23/15) in Spiritan schools, which encourage further education and progression to third-level (PT 23/100; 23/162; 23/83). Spiritan documentation also draws attention to the importance of a ‘strong basis in academic learning’, which ‘affords all participants in Spiritan education the opportunity to become enlightened and dynamic self-directed agents of change’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 25). Farragher points out that ‘the reputation of the French College [Blackrock College] for the excellence of its teaching had already travelled abroad by 1870’ (Farragher 2011, p. 7).



#### 4.5.1.3 Provision of co and extra-curricular activities and resources

Participants acknowledged the advantages (in terms of the range of subjects, extra-curricular activities and resources) of the broad model of education provided by fee charging Spiritan schools. Over 96% of parents regarded extra-curricular activities provided by the school as ‘very important’ (56.2%) or ‘important’ (40.6%).

#### 15. The extra-curricular activities it provides (306 responses)

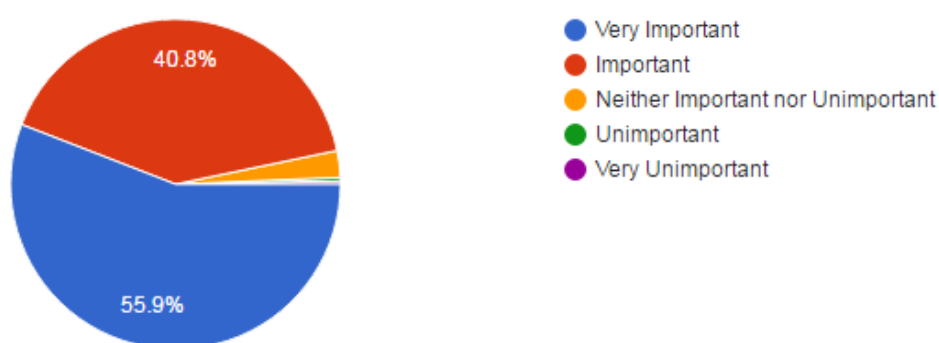


Figure 4.3: Parental Responses to Q. 15

Parents stressed the importance of excellent choices in subject and extra-curricular activities (PT 22/83; 23/22; 23/53), which ‘can be incorporated with greater ease under a fee paying system, and this is a great benefit to the scholars of this system’ (PT 23/137). Echoing this sentiment one parent remarked:

The Spiritan fee-paying schools provide a first-class education. The subject choice in the curriculum offers children more options than in other schools. The vast array of sporting choices allow each child to be physically active and consequently healthy, in a sport which suits them. For musical and creative children, there are in-school musical instrument lessons, choral singing, orchestra, two school musicals in a dedicated theatre and the annual [name] concert which allows talented children to display their skills. All of this is provided in an environment permeated with the Christian and Spiritan values of Kindness, Caring and being there for one another. This environment I believe builds and develops character. (PT 23/151)

A Spiritan school ‘provides a wide academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular educational experience to engage each student in what interests them’ (Ethos Committee, 2015, p. 25), as evidenced in the wide and varied range of activities provided for in these schools (DEA 2015, p. 64). Principals also openly acknowledged the advantage of additional resources and extra-curricular activities.

Not all parents, however, held the extra-curricular activities in as high a regard, as indicated in the following parental response: ‘it is more for a broad education we chose to send our sons to a Spiritan school than the provision of extra-curricular subjects or the socio-economic mix of the school’ (PT 24/19).

#### **4.5.1.4 The imperative to use advantage in service of others**

While findings from this study emphasise holistic development, inclusive of academic excellence, as the cornerstone of Spiritan education, commitment to the development of ‘confident, well rounded and well educated students’ (PT 23/188) is not intended to be an individualistic, self-serving enterprise, or an end in and of itself. This would miss the point of Spiritan education entirely. Constitutive of this holistic development is the directive of outreach in service of others. Principal 2 described mission outreach as ‘an integral part’ of the school and spoke of ‘reaching out to the less fortunate in society on a local level and embedding ourselves in the community and [developing] an appreciation that we are very privileged’. Echoing this sentiment, Principal 3 stated:

One of the key things that I believe that we have to get across – is that when you are given a lot, a lot is expected of you, so it’s not just a simple thing of ‘me, me, me’, ‘I need this and I have all this’ ... you are given the opportunities, you are given the resources, you are given the time but you are given this with a view towards service ... You get a lot; you need to give a lot.

In this regard the patron representative concurred, stating, ‘while giving the best education possible ... Catholic social teaching makes it quite clear that if you are gifted, that if you are privileged – for want of a better word – that brings with it responsibility’.

Findings from the parental survey suggest that the inculcation of ‘a spirit of consideration for [their] fellow human beings’ (PT 22/178) and ‘appreciation of the importance of volunteerism and giving back to society’ (PT 22/186; 23/187) constitute a key objective in choosing a Spiritan education. Students in Spiritan schools are not encouraged to be ‘selfish, egotistical rich kids’ (PT 22/143), but instead are ‘imbued with a keen awareness of poverty and deprivation, and an empathy ...[and are] aware that they are lucky but that gives them a responsibility to reach out and help others less fortunate than themselves’ (PT 22/20). The mantra ‘to whom much is given, much is expected’ (Luke 12:48) was echoed by all participant groups and the PR, and is supported by Spiritan documentation.

Spiritan school communities ‘recognise their economic and educational privilege and that this privilege carries a responsibility towards those less well off’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 19). ‘The teaching of character is valued and built on an intimate life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ ... [and] encourages a personal development that promotes self-discipline and self-sacrifice as inherent to “human flourishing”’ (ibid., p. 26).

#### **4.5.1.5 Provision of a values-based education**

When Père Leman founded the first Spiritan college (Blackrock College), he had ‘no ready-made plan to hand ... it could be taken for granted that the school first and foremost would be Catholic and Spiritan in all aspects’ (Farragher 2000, p. 30). Schools conducted by the congregation were, according to Farragher, ‘intended to be primarily Catholic schools where the whole educational process was meant to be imbued with a Christian Ethos’ (Farragher 2000, p. 61). The vast majority of students attending fee charging Spiritan schools are Catholic (see Figure 4.4).

## 5. What is the religion of your son/daughter? (310 responses)

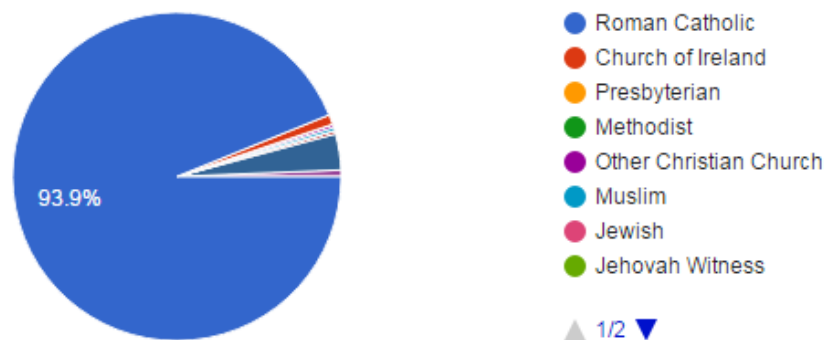


Figure 4.4: Parental Responses to Q. 5

The fact that other parents with a similar religion sent their children to this fee charging Spiritan school was, for 10.3%, ‘very important’ and, for 32.1%, ‘important’ (see Figure 4.5).

## 13. The fact that other parents with a similar religion to yours send their children to the school (302 responses)

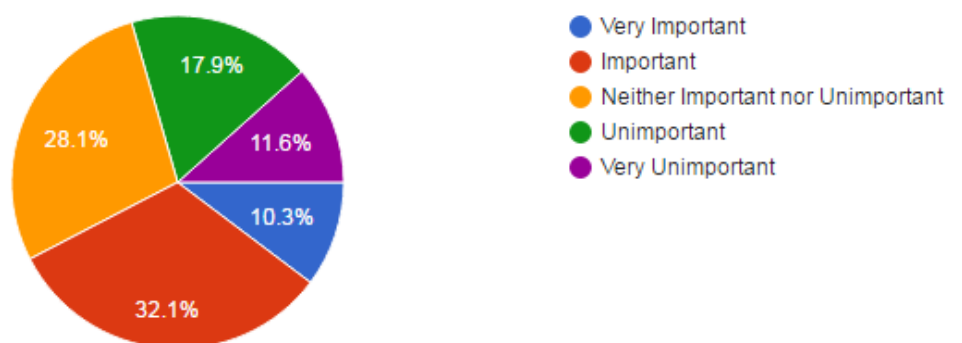


Figure 4.5: Parental Responses to Q. 13

Findings from the parental survey indicate a strong desire for the inculcation of a strong moral code (PT 23/47; 23/10; 22/83; 23/53; 23/78; 23/96; 23/28; 23/100; 23/124; 23/125; 23/138) and Catholic education (PT 22/40; 23/18; 24/25) as part of their child’s holistic education.

Parents specified the importance of a Spiritan ethos, ‘which encourages students to be the best that they can be for themselves, their peers and their community’ (PT 23/6) and which, ‘transforms the children to be morally straight, and independent and well-rounded’ (PT 23/3) ‘good Christian people’ (PT 23/5). Spiritan schools ‘set good moral and ethical parameters for the students’ (PT 23/53) and play a vital role in providing ‘islands of faith in the middle of a sea of disbelief’ (PT 23/157). The importance of Spiritan schools in providing a values-based education is evidenced in the following parental responses:

In the increasing secularisation and individualisation of Irish society Spiritan schools play a vital role in attempting to communicate to the boys the importance of strong values anchored in a Christian ethos and their responsibility to be decent members of society and an influence for the good of society. (PT 23/62)

My hope is, that as a Catholic School a Spiritan school will teach love of God and love of neighbour; true charity of course arising from a love of God. Research in the US shows that religious people give more generously to charity than non-religious people – an indication that a religious education (and up-bringing) is of benefit to society. Not only that, students well-schooled in Catholic Social teaching (thinking in particular of the Magisterium of Leo XIII in, for example, *Rerum Novarum*) will ensure those students, as members of the wider community, go on to be the workers who give what’s expected for their wages, who go on to become the just employers, the civil servants and politicians who respect and support families in all financial situations, and who go on to become citizens acutely aware of their social duty to their fellow man, and who support and contribute to the common good. (PT 22/40)

[Fee charging Spiritan schools] encourage the boys to think in a counter-cultural way. They are an essential counter point to the aggressive secularism which is all-pervasive in civil society. They encourage the boys to ‘be there’ (get involved in every and any way), be caring, and be truthful. They teach the boys that there are different ways to excel in life by awarding on Prize Day boys for their involvement in all aspects of life, academic, musical, sporting, art, woodwork, leadership, gaining a place on the group going to Lourdes, being an ‘all-rounder’, for example. They teach ‘be doers of the Word, not hearers only’. (PT 23/157)

#### **4.5.1.6 Shaping future leaders?**

Findings from the parental survey questionnaire strongly suggest the widely-held perception that fee charging Spiritan schools provide education for the transformation of Irish society by shaping the future leaders of society. By ‘creating young men who will be the conscience of the future’ (PT 23/25), these schools ‘provide a formative education to the boys to strive to do their best throughout their lives [which] ... encourages some ... to act as leaders rather than followers and thereby be instrumental in change management and implementation’ (PT 23/73). Spiritan schools play ‘a massive role in preparing these young men for a role in industry, sport, government, etc. in which these beliefs can be brought to bear’ (PT 23/195). The emphasis on academic excellence and the high levels of progression to third-level ‘in turn leads to the production of the next generation of professionals, politicians, health care professionals, business men, social entrepreneurs’ (PT 23/83), and future leaders in our communities/country (PT 22/16; 22/168; 23/15; 23/22) with ‘a good set of moral values’ (PT 23/98). ‘Many high level executives, educators, judges, doctors have been educated in our school. They make an immense contribution to society’ (PT 23/79).

Principal 3 echoed this sentiment stating, ‘we have to be able to influence the leaders as well’, and Principal 4 concurred, stating:

If this school became [disadvantaged school name] it would be completely separated from influence, from influencing policy in society. What is needed is that Christian conscience around the Cabinet table and in places of influence ... if it was a non-fee paying school or if they were just dealing with inner city schools, how big an impact could they make beyond?

Findings, however, indicate the need for caution in relation to the perception that fee charging schools shape the leaders of tomorrow and suggest disagreement of varying degrees, with the perception of fee charging schools shaping leaders, as evidenced in the following responses:

ALL schools, irrespective of funding, play a crucial role in educating for the transformation of Irish society. I feel this is an issue for the education system as a whole rather than just one sector within the system. (PT 23/54)

I'd like to think that Irish society was being transformed; I'm afraid not. I don't feel that any school or category of schools should carry the burden of responsibility for such an ambitious undertaking. (PT 23/58)

I have four different children in four different schools and am not sure that I notice a difference in the way that [school name] plays a role that is different to any of the other 3 schools that my other children attend. (PT 23/67)

Principal 1 states, 'I'm not going to go down that road of saying "well, of course, we provide the people who are going to be the leaders of tomorrow". I have no idea if they are going to be the leaders of tomorrow'. The following parental responses also capture the broad spectrum of disagreement in relation to this perception:

Transformation to what I wonder? A more equal society? I don't think so'. (PT 23/7)

Fee charging Spiritan schools actually entrench the status quo and sustain inequality from my experience. (PT 23/36)

They don't provide any transformation just continue to create class division and cultural aspirations a fee-paying school can provide in the future. We all want the best for our children so we buy into the dream and are all culpable for continuing to automatically send our children to schools we feel have high social standing. (PT 23/135)

#### **4.5.1.7 Providing a 'quality' education that highlights the inadequacies of the state sector**

Findings from the parental survey clearly indicate that the quality of education provided by fee charging Spiritan schools is of vital importance (as indicated in Figure 4.6).

## 9. The quality of the education it provides (308 responses)

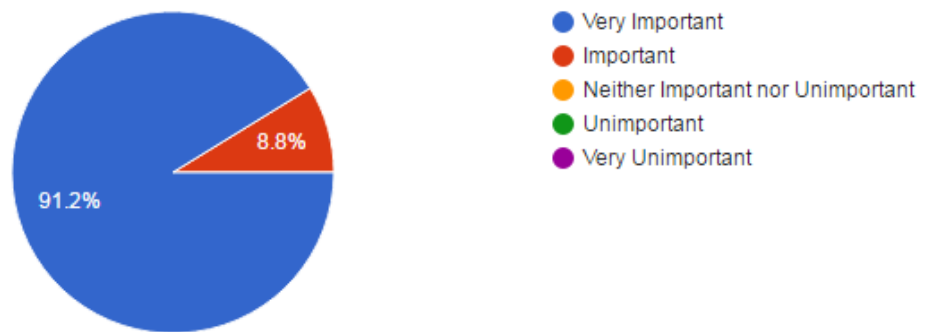


Figure 4.6: Parental Responses to Q. 9

Findings from this study also indicate that participants believed the quality of education provided in fee charging Spiritan schools highlighted the inadequacies of the state-funded school sector. In this regard, P5 stated the following:

The way to deal with the inequality in Irish education is to invest in all schools equally ... the reality is that the education system in Ireland is underfunded ... It's a very old game around when ... you find ... a target to blame and to blame 4 or 5% of the school sector which happens to have landed on a particular funding model, that 4 or 5% of the population can both afford and want to use and to use that as a distraction from the reality that the other 95% of schools are underfunded.

Echoing a similar sentiment, the PR concurred, stating, 'the quality of education and environment ... [and] ... the facilities and opportunities that are available in Spiritan schools should be available in all schools in Ireland.'

Parents also voiced strong opinions in this regard. The 'elite' (PT 23/75), 'fantastic' (PT 23/108) and 'superior' (PT 23/156; 23/88) education provided by fee charging Spiritan schools 'should be held up as a standard to which all schools aspire' (PT 23/14) and act as 'a benchmark for what a second-level education should aspire to be throughout the state, rather than being regarded as an elitist organisation that should be dismantled so that the level of education can be "brought down" to that of other state schools' (PT 23/73). One parent also remarked that '[politicians] want the whole education system to be just as bad as the public system' (PT 23/43).



#### 4.5.1.8 Providing choice within the education system

Findings from this study (see Figures 4.7, 4:8 and 4.9) suggest that parents are making a very deliberate choice and ‘passing other schools’ (P1) to send their children to fee charging Spiritan schools. Echoing this sentiment, P5 stated:

When we map [parents], we see that they cross other schools, they pass other schools to get here but they don’t pass other Spiritan schools to get here ... We are very clearly providing a certain model of education that is attracting parents and parents cross all sorts of other schools to get here. As they are entitled to do and as they should do to find a particular model and no doubt we have kids crossing our doors to get to other schools to provide different models of education as well. That’s one of the great joys of the Irish education system, isn’t it?

### 3. When did you make the decision to apply to send your son/daughter to this school?

(311 responses)

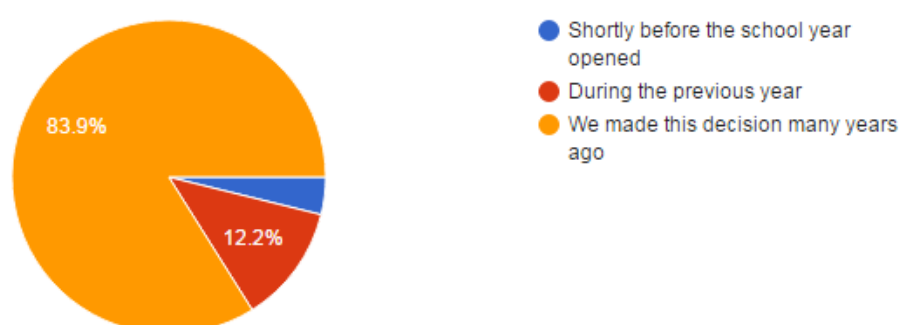


Figure 4.7: Parental Responses to Q. 3

4. Which statement best describes your position when you chose this school?  
(311 responses)

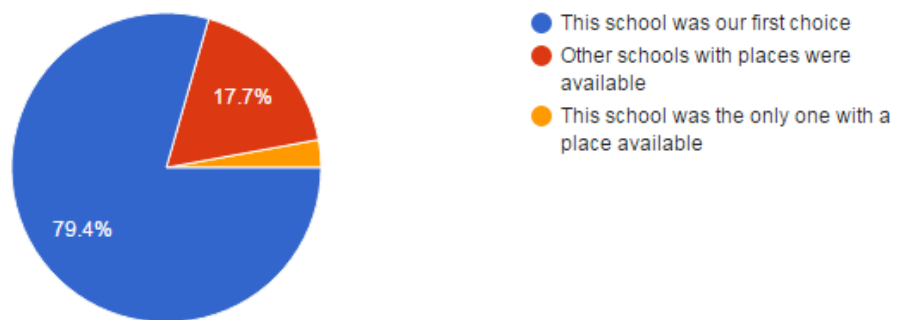


Figure 4.8: Parental Responses to Q. 4

6. Would you consider this school to be your local secondary school?  
(308 responses)

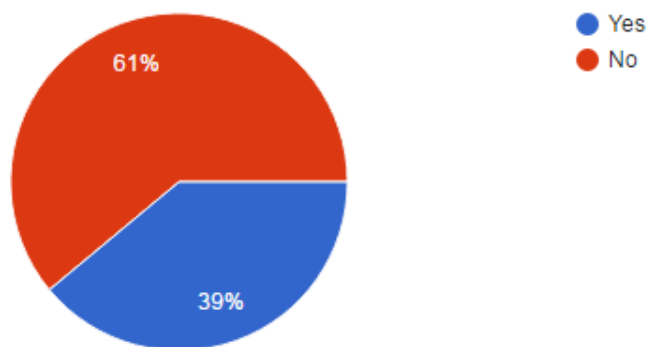


Figure 4.9: Parental Responses to Q. 6

Parents should 'have the right to send their children to fee paying schools. In this first world if you can pay you have a choice the same goes for healthcare. It is important that as a country all schools offer a good standard of education but like in all things in life if you can and are prepared to pay more then so be it' (PT 24/15). Echoing this sentiment, PT (24/24) stated:

I believe in choice. It is a positive thing that those who wish to pay their hard-earned money on their children's education have the choice to do so. If we have no fee-paying schools then there is no choice. Having the ability to pay for my children's education is positive not negative. If we do away with fee-paying schools the cost of education to the government will rise and then everyone will suffer.

Parents choose fee charging schools because they want the best for their children (PT 22/38; 22/141; 24/16). Principal 1 echoed this sentiment and stated:

I think that parents will always want what is best for their child, and I mean this gently and kindly ... but none of our parents ever wanted us mixing with somebody who was going to drag us down. That doesn't mean that they wanted us to be with people who would stick up their noses and be mean to people either but it's about a parent's ambition as well, for their child.

If according to one parent 'you love and want the best for your children, pay for it...if you cannot afford it, you are not trying hard enough or don't care (love them) enough. Tough fact to hear' (PT 24/41).

The question arises, however, as to how free parents are in choosing these schools. Bearing in mind the constitutional right of parents to choose the type of education they regard as suitable for their child and the right of the affluent to a Catholic education (Collins 2012, Dorr 2012), findings from this study indicate that parents who choose fee charging schools may not be as free as one might imagine in making such a choice. The choice available to parents of second-level school boys in South County Dublin 'is very limited' (PT 24/67) 'if they wish for their sons to be brought up with a religious ethos' (PT 24/7).

#### **4.5.1.9 Saving the state money**

Findings also indicate that, in choosing to send their children to fee charging Spiritan schools, parents perceive that they are, in fact, saving the state money that can be used to improve the public system, as evidenced in the following parental responses:

Our decision to send our children to fee paying schools takes the burden off the state to educate our children and the monies paid are post tax income. We have chosen not to spend in other areas of our income in order to put all four of our children through private schools. It is a post-tax disposable income budget/choice parents have made. We are already contributing to the government's education budget by paying an extraordinary high level of taxes in this country and therefore the capitation to fee paying private schools should remain. We have paid for it. (PT 24/6)

Fee paying schools save the state vast sums of money by reducing the overall cost to the exchequer of education provision ... The cost to the state of providing land buildings and equipment is a burden largely taken privately by these schools and the parents who fund them. These parents also pay tax and thereby over-contribute to the public system which pays less per capita to fee paying schools than to the state-funded schools. The cost to the state of buying the land buildings and equipment would be prohibitive and I would not advocate that the state should spend its money in this way. Better to spend it on the state-funded school sector. (PT 24/43)

The school raises a large amount of funds to contribute to the running costs. If all schools were free the government could not support the system, while paying the fees we are saving the country money that can be then be put back into the less well-off schools. (PT 23/87)

Despite my best efforts and the findings of the DES 2013 report, I could not find a clear and definitive answer as to whether or not fee charging schools save the state money.

#### **4.5.2 Minor Theme 2: Perceptions of fee charging schools as contributing to educational inequality and social class division**

The advantages of attending fee charging Spiritan schools were clearly acknowledged by participants from all the stakeholder groups. Nevertheless, perceptions varied among participants when faced with the contentious question as to whether or not these schools contribute to educational inequality and social division, as evidenced in the spectrum of diverse opinions among principals and parents.

19."Fee-paying schools contribute to social class division and educational inequality in Ireland" (Lynch 1988; 2001; Lynch & Lodge 2002; Lynch & Moran 2006).

(307 responses)

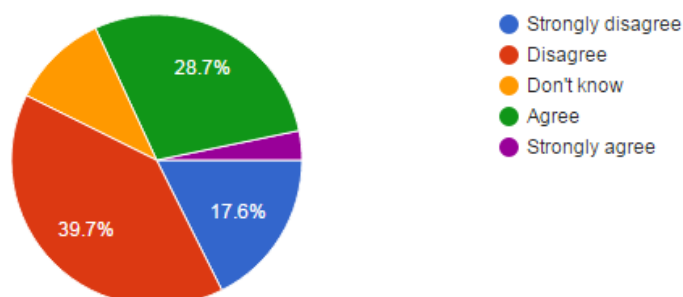


Figure 4.10: Parental Responses to Q. 19

Opinion, as to whether or not fee charging Spiritan schools perpetuate social division and act as agents of educational inequality, was divided among parents (as indicated in Figure 4.10). Opinion was also divided in relation to the importance of 'standard of living' (as indicated in Figure 4.11). In relation to this issue the following remark was made: 'I think there is a big social divide in Ireland between pupils attending fee and non-fee paying schools, and I don't like it. I don't want my children to feel entitled to anything. Any ways to teach them equality and tolerance [is] to be welcomed' (PT 24/1).

10.The fact that other parents with a similar standard of living to yours send their children to the school

(307 responses)

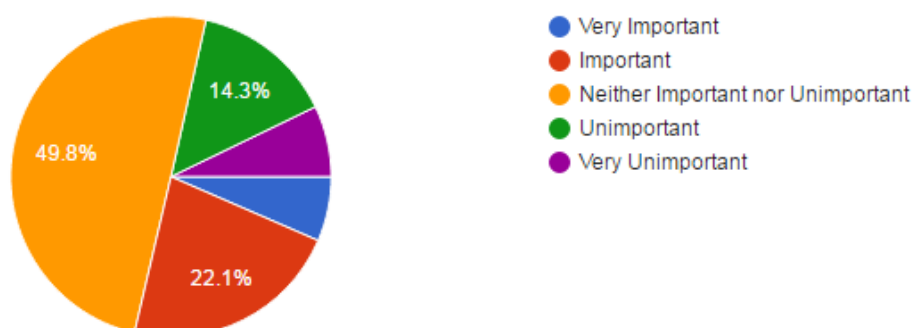


Figure 4.11: Parental Responses to Q. 10

Principal 4 spoke of the ‘smaller classes, broader choice, additional teachers, which provide a better opportunity for somebody to enhance their opportunities to go into third-level’ (P4). These advantages, according to P4:

... enabled students from fee charging schools to ‘get a few steps up the ladder’ vis-à-vis somebody who, might have been in an overcrowded classroom, didn’t get proper resources, where there was no guidance counselling and a lot of the ills that are currently bestowed on the voluntary secondary schools and the community comprehensives [thus] perpetuating inequality in society.

Principal 4 went on to state: ‘I think where equity is concerned by virtue of the fact that you charge EUR 5,500 or EUR 6,500 you are immediately omitting people who can’t afford it. Principal 2, however, completely disagreed with the proposition that fee charging schools contribute to educational inequality and social class division. S/he stated the following:

That’s absolute nonsense. Inequality in society? I don’t think so. The whole thrust of the fee charging schools – they are all faith schools – they are not private institutions and they are all working and making a contribution to society ... life is a normal curve, get used to it. What you want is that those at the top end do as much as they can for those at the bottom end. You are not contributing to it by putting people into different schools, in fact, you are reducing it ... Why in health is it all right to get tax relief? Why can’t parents get tax relief for sending their sons to fee paying schools? That frees up the public sector and I think it’s a different approach. You see, what happens in a country like Ireland – people are jealous.

Principal 5 echoed a similar sentiment. In response to the proposition, s/he stated: ‘I would resent it. I would dispute it and I would say that fee-paying Spiritan schools are indeed well resourced ... I do resent it when a government which has presided over five years of austerity sends signals out to us that we’re somehow promoting social inequality.’ Principal 1 offered a more nuanced response, agreeing in part with one aspect of the proposition (social division) and disagreeing with the other (educational inequality):

Are we contributing to social class division? I think we are. I think that to one extent where you live is as much a factor in social division as where you go to school ... I think anything where there is a cost involved is divisive. It is divisive if half the class have iPhone 6s and the other half don’t. It’s divisive if some of you are going to Irish college and some of you aren’t. It’s divisive if Daddy is buying you a pony.

Anything that involves money is always going to be divisive and fee-paying schools charge money and therefore are...Educational inequality - no. I don't think we are contributing to educational inequality. I think when push comes to shove, parents make decisions for their children and that does not impact on the child in the school down the road ... when push comes to shove I can buy private health insurance for my child if I want to, I can get them grinds, I can send them to Irish college, I can send them abroad for a year – I can give them loads of things that are advantages for them regardless of a fee charging school, that is not disadvantaging anybody else. I don't think we are disadvantageous to any school. I understand where the argument is coming from, but I don't buy it.

#### **4.6 Summary of Findings**

Findings from this study indicate that Spiritan schools are characterised by a vibrant sense of community and suggest a strong collective commitment, among all stakeholder groups, to the preservation, sustenance and development of Spiritan identity and mission in fee charging Spiritan schools. Findings also reveal that, though constitutive of the holistic educational enterprise, the emphasis placed on Spiritan mission, in terms of the day-to-day educational process, varies among stakeholder groups.

Findings reveal an uneasy tension surrounding the apparent paradox of fee charging schools serving the poor as evidenced in the broad spectrum of opinion among participants in responding to the question as to whether or not these schools serve the poor. Service of the materially poor is perceived as a continuum. While stakeholders perceive that fee charging Spiritan schools serve the poor through raising awareness of poverty and, to a more limited degree, through the raising of critical and challenging questions (one end of the service continuum), findings strongly suggest that fundraising is perceived as the primary means of serving the materially poor (other end of the service continuum). Strong support was expressed among participants for immersion projects and pastoral placement programmes as vehicles for the new and evolving Spiritan mission. While findings indicate two models of immersion currently in operation in Spiritan schools, they also reveal a movement towards a more encounter-based model of linking and partnership, as opposed to a benefactor model.

Findings also reveal the perception that fee charging Spiritan schools serve different types of poverty in different ways. Though their provision of a moral/Christian/Catholic/Spiritan education fee charging Spiritan schools serve the materially wealthy but the spiritually poor and act as new parishes.

Findings strongly suggest the perception that fee charging schools lack social diversity. While findings indicate a strong commitment, among all participant groups, to enhance social diversity through the provision of bursaries/scholarships/access programmes, findings reveal that, in terms of current practice, provision is low and varied among Spiritan schools. While findings indicate a preference among participants for the adoption of a social integration programme, as opposed to the provision of academic/sporting scholarships, they also highlight the challenges posed in implementing such a programme and suggest the need for a template.

Findings indicate a consensus, among all stakeholder groups, that fee charging schools provide a broad, holistic, quality and values-based education, centred on academic excellence and inclusive of a wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities, and suggest an acknowledgement that outreach to others (in less fortunate circumstances) was constitutive of this holistic education. Findings however reveal a complex tapestry of opinion in relation to the role these schools play in Irish society. These schools may, shape the future leaders of society, save the state money, provide choice and highlight the inadequacies of state schools or, they may not. They may reflect, or perpetuate, or seek to eliminate, social class division and educational inequality. In terms of understanding the role that fee charging schools play in Irish society, findings suggest that the only consensus is that there is no consensus. An interpretation of these findings is presented in Chapter Five.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Interpretation of Findings**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Interpretation involves ‘making sense of the data’ (Creswell 2012, p. 257). In qualitative research, interpretation involves personal reflections and relating the findings to past studies and literature and standing back from the data. Rooted in the interpretive-constructivist tradition, I interpret findings that emerge from the interaction between the researcher and the subject under study and that, at times, ‘coalesce around consensus’ (Guba and Lincoln 2005, p. 196), but which are always shaped by my own experience (Creswell 2007, p. 20). As a qualitative researcher, I am present in the reporting of the study (Creswell 2012, p. 280). As a reflexive researcher, I am aware of, and have openly discussed, my role in the study (see 1.5 and 3.5) in a way that ‘honors the site and participants’ (Creswell 2012, p. 474). As a micro-ethnographic researcher, I realise that my interpretation is only one possible interpretation and that my report has no ‘privileged authority over other interpretations made by readers, participants, and other researchers’ (ibid., p. 474). Being reflexive also means that my conclusions are often ‘tentative or inconclusive, leading to new questions to answer’ (ibid., p. 474).

Analysis of the data under the thematic headings identified in Chapter Four gave rise to the following key findings characterised under two main headings:

Main Heading 1: Perceptions of the ‘nature’ of the service provided in fee charging Spiritan schools

Finding 1: Stakeholders’ understanding of service fluctuates between narrow and integral models of service

Finding 2: Stakeholders’ understanding of service fluctuates between concern and option for the most poor

Finding 3: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan Schools serve different types of poverty in different ways

Main Heading 2: Addressing the lacunae: the perceptions of Spiritan identity and mission in fee charging schools in Ireland

Finding 4: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan schools lack social diversity and serve those within the school and in the developing world

Finding 5: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan schools are communities of memory and elite schools

Finding 6: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan schools use their advantages to serve others

## **5.2 Main Heading 1: Perceptions of the ‘Nature’ of the Service Provided in Fee Charging Spiritan Schools**

Findings from this study indicate that, in relation to the Spiritan mission to serve the poor, stakeholders perceive that the model of service offered fluctuates between narrow and integral and the nature of the service offered fluctuates between the (less challenging) *concern* and (more challenging) *option* for the poor. The perception that fee charging schools serve different types of poverty, e.g. spiritual poverty also presents challenges. Findings 1, 2 and 3 explore these perceptions.

### **5.2.1 Finding 1: Stakeholders’ understanding of service fluctuates between narrow and integral models of service**

Findings from this study suggest a significant variation in terms of the nature of the service offered both among and within fee charging Spiritan schools. The ‘nature’ of the service offered can be characterised as a continuum ranging from a more traditional narrow model of service that focuses primarily on fundraising to a more integral model characterised by the raising of critical questions and implied action in relation to structural injustice (Dorr 2012, pp. 348–349, p.186; Dillon 2013).

The continuum of service, which has at the one end narrow and at the other end integral service, has direct resonances with the understanding of service as outlined in church documentation. While it is clear that service of ‘the common good’ is constitutive of the mission of the Catholic church (Pope Leo XIII 1885, para. 4; 1891, para. 22; Paul VI 1967; Collins 2012; Dorr 2012), the nature of the service advocated at different points in the church’s historical evolution has, depending on the context, occupied varying points along the same continuum. The meaning of service has been plural and at times it has been ‘perverted and even contradicted’ (Dorr 2012, p. 136). The obligation ‘to give to the poor out of one’s “superflua”’ (Dorr 2012, p. 135, citing Pope Leo XIII 1891) meant that ‘turning a deaf ear to the cry of the poor’ could be justified ‘on the grounds that one has to live up to one’s social standing’ (ibid., p.136). Charity can be understood as an imposition on the rich of ‘an obligation that is more than that of giving alms from their superfluous goods’ (Dorr 2012, p. 153, referring to *Gaudium et spes*) or as an imperative ‘action on behalf of justice’ (Dorr 2012, p. 218, referring to *Justice in the World*). It is important to note that this evolution and movement from charity to justice and development to liberation (Dorr 2012, p. 186) is not sequential and ‘progressive’ as history evolves. It could be argued that earlier church encyclicals advocate a more integral model of service, as evidenced in Dorr’s understanding of Pope Leo XIII’s great social encyclical, *Rerum novarum* (Dorr 2012, pp. 18–44).

As argued in Chapters One and Two of this study, service in its integral sense is a constitutive dimension of the Catholic church in general, and of the Catholic school in particular. This theme finds particular expression in Spiritan schools. Documentation relating to Spiritan education consistently affirms integral service and ‘work for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice and poverty’ (DEA 2011, pp. 6–7) as central to Spiritan mission (Rule of Life 14) and to the Spiritan core values (Appendix A) in education.

When exploring the concept of service, findings from this study indicate a strong commitment on behalf of all fee charging Spiritan schools to fundraising and to reaching out to the economically less fortunate. Whilst narrow service is clearly in evidence, as demonstrated in the abundance of fundraising activities, the degree to which fee charging Spiritan schools in Ireland bear witness to diakonia (i.e. service)

in its integral sense is unclear. These findings support the findings of Dillon (2013), which suggest that, while charity is strongly evidenced in Spiritan school activities, the raising of critical questions is less so. Findings from this research project indicate a bias among fee charging Spiritan schools towards a more traditional, pre-Vatican II (Grace 2002, pp. 73–74) model of service understood in its narrow sense.

Bearing in mind the long tradition of charitable giving in Catholic schools and colleges (Grace 2013, p. 89) and the fact that ‘though highly effective as service providers, the Catholic religious congregations added little to intellectual reflection on the social issues with which they were directly involved’ (Fahey 1998, p. 204, Fahey 2007, p. 148), these findings are neither peculiar to fee charging Spiritan schools, nor are they surprising.

### **5.2.2 Finding 2: Stakeholders’ understanding of service fluctuates between concern and option for the most poor**

The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter – it’s the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning  
(Mark Twain in a letter to George Bainton, 10/15/1888)

Service of those most in need lies at the heart of Spiritan mission. In terms of expressing service of the poor, Spiritan documentation pertaining to Spiritan mission in education fluctuates between ‘the challenging Spiritan *Option for the Poor* and the less challenging Spiritan Core Value in Education of *Care for the Poor*. In this regard, the Ethos Appraisal (2015) raises the insightful question, ‘Would reflection on the difference between them help address the tension between the Spiritan Option for the Poor and the reality of Spiritan fee charging Schools?’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 11). Concern for the poor was subsequently revised and the original ‘option for the poor’ was returned to (DEA 2015, p. 36) in order to emphasise the need for ‘commitment and action’ (DEA 2016, p. 17). This document states:

A more informed understanding of the reality of an unequal world where the resources are unequally distributed is best achieved through entering into the world of the poor. This is more than ‘concern’. It is a life choice, an ‘option for the poor’. A Spiritan education aligned with Spiritan mission will value an option for the poor and strive to be an effective means of bringing about a more just world through educating for social justice, facilitating respectful engagement with people in need, and being as socially inclusive as possible (DEA 2016, p.17)

Findings from this study echo a similar tension between *care/concern* and *option* and suggest a substantial variation (both among and within participant groups) and differing emphases in terms of participant perceptions of the nature of service of the poor. Findings suggest a strong consensus among participants in relation to the importance of raising money for the poor, raising students' awareness of poverty and imbuing students with a social conscience. The perception, however, that fee charging schools serve the poor through the raising of critical questions that openly challenge injustice and structural inequality, though occasionally referred to, did not emerge as a key finding in this study. The great danger of a bias towards a narrow model of service, characteristic of the findings of this study, is that it can become 'a substitute for radical social and economic reform' (Grace 2002, p. 74). In the words of Principal 4, 'I think that we can all cast off the cloak and go down and work in deprived areas and we can all become missionaries, but I don't think I'm Christian enough to do that myself, to be honest!'. This bias towards fundraising is not unique to fee charging Spiritan schools. Mulvany (2009, cited in McCarthy 2010, p. 16) highlights that, 'while Irish people continue to demonstrate an openness in charitable support to developing countries, this is not matched by greater awareness of and critical engagement with the root causes of global inequality'.

Findings indicate differing perceptions in relation to the nature and style or function of 'immersion' service learning programmes and a corresponding difference in regard to the underlying spirituality of poverty. Reflecting a more narrow model of service, students perceive themselves and are perceived by others primarily as benefactors who fundraise and make a positive impact. The spirituality of poverty underlying this type of model of immersion is inspired by *concern*, *care* or *compassion* for the poor. The broader, more integral model is based on encounter, entering the world of the poor, opting *for* and working *with*, and is rooted in a spirituality of poverty that emphasises a solidarity that moves 'beyond compassion' (McVerry 2008; p. 83; Dorr 2012, p. 272; Sullivan 2000, p. 143; Pope Francis 2013, para. 188). Whilst both approaches to the immersion programmes offer the potential to be transformative experiences, the latter would appear to embody a more integral encounter-based model of service characteristic of the Spiritan mission and echoes

the more substantive ‘linking model of partnership between schools ... as a vehicle for joint learning’ preferred by WorldWise (WorldWise 2010, cited in McCarthy 2010, p. 6). This encounter model echoes the sentiment expressed by the provincial that ‘some things are not learnt they have to be experienced, lived and undergone (Whelan 2016).

### **5.2.3 Finding 3: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan Schools serve different types of poverty in different ways.**

In addition to suggesting the perception that the nature and style of service offered in fee charging Spiritan schools fluctuates between narrow and integral service and is characterised by a bias towards narrow service, most especially in relation to service of the economically poor, findings from this study also indicate the perception that these schools can be justified on the grounds that they serve different types of poverty in different ways, i.e. the spiritually poor. Pope Francis states:

Young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. At the same time, they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits. We are faced with an educational challenge. (Pope Francis, cited in DEA 2015, p. 56)

Principals interviewed for this study echoed the sentiment expressed by Pope Francis and identified material wealth, characteristic of their student body, as an added challenge in promoting service through encounter and as constituting a type of poverty itself:

A lot of the students in our school come from pretty wealthy backgrounds and trying to simulate a situation whereby they are going to engage with the poor can be difficult ... I think it’s something that is challenging but the challenge is there for the management of the school to embrace and to get on with it and I feel that we do a good job. (P4)

Sometimes they maybe have too much money and money is given instead of love, you know, so there are many, many different ways and different examples of poverty. (P3)

Spiritan documentation refers to the decline in religious practice in the context of the growing secularisation of Irish society (DEA 2015, p. 71). This is also widely evidenced in literature (Egan 2014, p. 1; The Irish Episcopal Conference 2010, p. 31). Findings from this study concur and suggest that fee charging schools, which could be described as ‘new parishes’, are serving the spiritually poor as evidenced in a strong commitment to investment in chaplaincy and RE in Spiritan schools. The PR states that, ‘from the point of view of ethos, be very clear that there must be chaplaincy service and good chaplaincy services, good RE time and service and space in all our schools.’ Spiritan schools ‘place the teaching of religion at the heart of their programme of instruction’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 27; DEA 2015, p. 22). RE is a core subject in all Spiritan schools; it is prioritised in terms of timetabling and delivered by dedicated and qualified teachers of RE. All schools commit resources to chaplaincy (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 27; DEA 2015, pp. 69–72; McEvoy 2014, p. 25) and pastoral care, which ‘have been identified as a priority in the Irish Province’ (Conaty 2013, p. 92). Principals expressed great appreciation for the Spiritan chaplains provided for in their schools, and all schools had additional chaplaincy services in terms of additional full and/or part-time chaplains and/or chaplaincy teams. One school had a privately-paid full-time chaplain, a part-time time chaplain, and a sacramental chaplain provided by the Spiritan congregation.

The ‘evolving situation in Irish society and the emerging profile of family life’ requires movement from ‘a more sacramental focus ... to a model of accompaniment and facilitation of faith (i.e. evangelisation)’ in chaplaincy (Conaty 2013, p. 92). The Ethos Appraisal (2015) affirms this, stating that ‘along with the Religion Department the Chaplaincy Team is recognised as a key player in leading the spiritual life of the school community and companioning members in their individual faith journeys’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 27).

Although numbers of Irish Spiritan personnel are in decline, vocations in the ‘overseas mission territories’ in the developing world are ‘buoyant’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 7). In considering the appointment of Spiritan religious from the global south to ministries in Ireland, ‘the Province considers it prudent to adopt an incremental rather than a wholesale approach to this, and to treat mission appointments from abroad to Ireland with discretion and discernment’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 8).

The PR also draws attention to an issue of possible inequality in undertaking such an endeavour, stating:

Do you just bring people from a third world situation to do chaplaincy [in Spiritan schools]? And there is a merit in that, but that can also be another focus of inequality because you are bringing in religious services or spiritual services where maybe they should be somewhere else. Maybe they should be in a disadvantaged place. Is it right, and this is also a question for the Church in Ireland, as the number of clergy decline, is it right, just because you have money to import clergy to offer religious services while other communities all over the world don't have access to the Eucharist, Sunday after Sunday, don't have proper parish structures or services, have not heard the Gospel?

This concern finds resonance with Ryan's (2008, p. 28) criticism of religious orders who maintain a presence in fee charging schools 'while other Catholics go without the Sunday Eucharist' (referred to in Chapter Two).

### **5.3 Main Heading 2: Addressing the lacunae: the perceptions of Spiritan identity and mission in fee charging schools in Ireland**

Findings from this study strongly suggest a lack of social diversity within fee charging Spiritan schools. Findings also indicate that the historical mission of these schools to serve the most poor and the poor in the developing world, has resulted in a perception of these schools as being removed from, as opposed to being a part of, Irish society. As a result of this, in terms of the role Spiritan fee charging schools play in Irish society, there appears to be a lacuna. Findings 4, 5 and 6 explore these lacunae.

#### **5.3.1. Finding 4: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan schools lack social diversity and serve those within the school and in the developing world**

And while I admit living in a gated community I would hope that this is not true of our schools. I have learnt from experience the worst thing about gated communities is not about being locked out but being locked in. (Whelan 2016)



Although findings from this study indicate an overwhelming positivity towards, and deeply-held appreciation of, the strong tradition and sense of community within Spiritan schools and of the great efforts Spiritan schools demonstrate to help their students ‘see beyond the social bubble in which they live’ (PT 23/180), reservation was expressed in relation to the perception of these schools as being too insular and ‘monocultural’ (PT 24/23). One parent commented, ‘it’s the same people doing the same things. No impact on those outside the “clique”’ (PT 23/118), while another remarked, ‘I think that the “old boys’ network” in fee-paying schools is unfair and excluding and that it is not something that should be promoted by a religious order. I think that any religious order that allows it has lost its way’ (PT 24/36).

Referring to one Spiritan fee charging school, the Ethos Appraisal (2015) alluded to ‘many false perceptions of it as “a rugby school” or a “school for the well-off” where students live in “a South Dublin bubble”’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 33). When faced with the question that a Spiritan school might be criticised as being ‘too insular, too inward-looking’ in terms of its service, Principal 2 responded as follows:

... to be honest, I’ve never seen that as a criticism of [school name] ... I think everything starts with family and then you extend that ... to look out for those around you. ... Now, if you can’t do it on that level then there is little chance of going beyond that and I think we have always got to be open to look out for those who we are familiar with. I think that’s the essential training.

A sense of community was the most cited core value according to the Ethos Appraisal (2015, p. 28) within Spiritan schools. It is interesting to note that the first Spiritan college to be founded (Blackrock College) was, in line with the vision of its founder, Père Leman, to be a self-contained, inward-looking institution whose associations with Irish society at large and with educational institutions in particular would be minimal (Farragher 1988, p. 121). It is unsurprising, therefore, that findings confirm the perception of a strong sense of commitment and duty of care to those ‘within’ the Spiritan ‘family’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 18) among participants.

The service of Spiritan missionaries in the developing world is widely documented and was referred to by representatives from all participant groups. Whilst acknowledging that ‘the school’s relationship to the local community and the wider

society is taken seriously', (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 15), there was consensus among participants and supporting evidence from documentation of the need for Spiritan schools to exercise a greater role in serving the poor in Irish society. In this regard the PR stated the following:

One of the dangers with the Spiritans being a missionary congregation is that the ethos can often be voiced or development can often be voiced in terms of the third world, not Ireland, whereas you do have extreme situations of poverty and disadvantage in Ireland and if the young people who are entrusted to our care for their education are not exposed to that and to its causes and to an understanding of how that can be tackled then I think we are somewhat failing in our job.

Findings from the parental survey also confirmed the need to bear greater witness to mission in an Irish context, as evidenced in the following quotations: 'I am not aware of the input that the Spiritan schools have to the poor in Ireland. I am aware of links to poorer countries and fundraising activities' (PT 22/5); 'Lots of work is done through various initiatives in the school which aim to serve the poor in developing countries' (PT 22/48); 'They serve the poor in Africa, I'm not sure how they serve the poor in Ireland, other than TY projects' (PT 22/60); 'I would like to see them do more charitable work in Ireland rather than necessarily in Africa where it costs families and the school community money to send them on these trips' (PT 22/28).

The need to maintain the tension between *serving those within* and *reaching out* to others in an Irish context was also evidenced in the participant responses to the proposed changes to the Admissions' Bill (Government of Ireland 2014)- one of the key changes proposed involves limiting the numbers of places reserved by schools for the sons/daughters of past-pupils. It is, according to one parent, 'important to widen the net somewhat in terms of pupils attending that would benefit the other children attending [school name]' (PT 24/23). While acknowledging that 'one of my sons is already in the school and the other two are guaranteed a place so it is easier for me to be magnanimous about it', one parent described the 'discrimination' against children whose parents did not attend the school previously as 'clearly unfair and elitist' (PT 24/25). Principal 1 remarked:

I understand tradition, I think tradition is incredibly important and I think it's a lovely thing in a family. The tradition might be Christmas carols or it might be where you went to school. I think it's a gorgeous thing to

have, I love that I have people who come in here and their grandparents went here and that's a beautiful connection for them to have but should that take priority over something else? Or should it be seen as something that has to be hung onto? I'm not sure what people are afraid of. Where are the others coming from? Are they coming out from the woods with sticks? ...We are educating kids. Are you determined to only teach a certain type of child? Catholic, preferably white, preferably English speaking and from this area – that's a very closed world.

The Spiritans declared their intention to actively seek out patronage of disadvantaged schools (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2012). Seeking a diversity *of* schools is undoubtedly an important development, but in striving to embrace integral service, the more challenging issue of diversity *within* schools needs to be addressed. Lynch argues that, 'if the socio-cultural dimension of the equality framework is to be taken seriously, then there is a need to educate *with* and *for* all forms of cultural and social diversity' (Lynch 2001, p. 403). Findings from this study indicate an openness and genuine commitment to introducing an access programme to fee charging Spiritan schools among and within participant groups. Spiritan documentation also affirms the commitment to increasing social diversity (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 20; DEA 2015, p. 40; Spiritans Province of Ireland 2012, p. 13; Spiritans Province of Ireland 2011).

Principal 4 asks, 'for whose benefit are these programmes being introduced?' This reservation raises pertinent questions in relation to the rationale for introducing such programmes. The following questions arise; Are access programmes introduced to salve conscience, provide opportunities for students who otherwise would not have access to such opportunities, or to enhance the educational experience and expose students from wealthy backgrounds to a more socially diverse group, or is it for all three reasons, and if so, in what order, and with what emphases?; Can a 5% or 10% percent change in the social profile of the student body really impact on the social diversity of a school?; According to what criteria, and on what basis, are these students to be selected – academic achievement, sporting prowess?

If the Spiritans were to subscribe, and Spiritan documentation suggests that they are, to Lynch's (2001, p. 403) claim that, 'if we are to educate for diversity and with diversity, we cannot be selective about the identities we respect and recognise', then creaming off that hurts other schools (Tuohy 2008, p. 130) is off the agenda.

The fact that the Spiritans, while providing support in the discussion around the issue of access, are not providing a template to schools, but instead are favouring a ‘trial and error’ approach, raises further questions.

Given the perception of fee charging Spiritan schools as self-perpetuating ‘old-boys’ networks’, as cited by a very small number of participants in this study and bearing the fee charging structure that leads to a lack of social diversity within these schools in mind, fee charging Spiritan schools could be viewed as insular, self-perpetuating, homogenous and monocultural bubbles/bastions of privilege (McEvoy 2014, p. 12; White 2012; Borooah, Dinnen and Lynch 2010; Lynch and Lodge 2002, Lynch 2001).

Bearing in mind the historical evolution of Spiritan schools and the preferred focus of the Spiritan mission (for those who are most poor), it is unsurprising that findings in this study indicate strong missionary links between Spiritan schools and the developing world. Charitable works are, according to these findings, directed towards those in ‘extreme’ poverty in the developing world. The lack of awareness of Spiritan mission in an Irish context, as evidenced in the findings of this study, was striking. Spiritan documentation also recognises that, while the focus of Spiritan mission has traditionally been in the developing world, ‘Ireland now is a place for mission’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 24).

### **5.3.2 Finding 5: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan schools are communities of memory and elite schools**

Findings from this study indicate that, in terms of their identity, Spiritan schools can be perceived both as ‘communities of memory’ (Bellah et al. 1985, cited in Meehan 2008) and elite schools (McCann 2003; O’Neill 2014).

As communities of memory, Spiritan schools, through their strong historical tradition and sense of community, have ‘a clear and shared mandate for the common good’ which sustains them in the context of the ‘ever expanding influence of state and market’ (Bellah et al. 1985, cited in Meehan 2008, p. 203). As communities of memory, Spiritan schools link ‘the past with the future as communities of hope’ (ibid., p. 203) and ‘are often important ways in which individuals enter into public

life' (ibid., p. 203). Their students get involved in public life 'not so much out of an intellectual choice but as a response to part of their identity, as fulfilling a responsibility to which life, heritage, and beliefs have called them' (ibid., p. 203).

Elite schools that have the upper middle classes as their Referent group (McCann 2003, pp. 161–162) are accessed via membership of a social class 'because one is who one is' (ibid., p. 162). The purpose of these schools is 'the handing on of tradition' (ibid., p. 162). Elite schools are characterised by alumni 'who are very active and who exercise a conservative influence on the evolution and development of the school'. These schools 'call forth phrases like the "old boy network", "alma mater" and the "old school tie"' (ibid., p. 162).

The strong tradition of past pupil unions and active parents' association (Harrington and Cox 2009; Semple 2009; Ethos Committee 2015, pp.10, 37; DEA 2015, p. 21) characteristic of fee charging Spiritan schools is documented and supported by the findings in this study and has resonances in Spiritan documentation and in literature. This perception also finds resonance with O'Neill's description of the wealthiest Irish Catholic families (1850–1900) who:

...had identified and pursued one obvious route to power and influence, a high-status education ... [and] chose to send their sons and daughters abroad to high-status Catholic schools in England or to the most prestigious boarding schools in Ireland for a specific goal: to further and enhance their career prospects, and by so-doing to place them within an established network of influential and well-connected peers. (O'Neill 2014, p. 208)

These elite Catholic schools 'developed a recognizably elite educational product which incorporated many of the surface aspects of an English public school experience but retained an overriding emphasis on Catholicism' (ibid., p. 208).

History has a role to play in the evolution of elite schools in Ireland. Religious congregations and religious-run schools have tended to be socially-stratified both among (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 46; Fahey 2007, p. 148) and within (Coolahan 1981, p. 55; McDonald 2008, p. 183) themselves. As defenders of the faith, Catholic

schools have reflected rather than challenged the social hierarchies. The Jesuits and Holy Ghost Fathers have historically provided a more ‘exclusive grammar school education, mainly for upper middle class boys’ Keating (2006, p. 63). Bearing this historical evolution in mind, the perception of fee charging Spiritan schools as elite schools is unsurprising.

While it is true that fee charging Spiritan schools in Ireland have historically catered for the more affluent in society (Keating 2006, p. 63), it is important also to note that elite Irish Catholic schools have historically ‘educated a more socially diverse demographic than elite schools in England, Sweden or America’ (O’Neill 2014, p. 25). Students attending elite Catholic schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘represented a mix of both the established landed elite and the rising middle and merchant classes, whose sights were trained on elite status or some degree of upward social mobility’ (O’Neill 2014, p. 25). For a boy like Éamon de Valera (former President of Ireland) who ‘had grown up in relatively modern circumstances in Co. Limerick ... an education in Blackrock was a privilege not a right’ (O’Neill 2014, p. 26). More recent findings however indicate that 90% of the intake of the fee charging schools are from social classes 1 and 2 (professional and managerial groups) and 3% were from classes 5, 6 and 7 (the semi-skilled and unskilled) (Lynch and Lodge 2002, pp. 40–42).

Referring to elite Catholic schools, O’Neill (2014) remarks that, historically, ‘the real emphasis at the schools and the orders behind them, however, was on Catholic advancement and the delivery of a quality education. The finery, the pomp, and the social clout mattered, of course, but not more than a Catholic education’ (O’Neill 2014, p. 205). Spiritan schools, since their foundation, are expected to be ‘Catholic and Spiritan in all aspects’ (Farragher 2000, p. 30). Whilst acknowledging ‘the tension between the option for the poor and fee charging schools’, management and staff of fee charging Spiritan schools ‘point out that their ministry to youth through Catholic education in Ireland is their key purpose and is now more critical than ever’ (Ethos Committee 2015, p. 20). Findings from this study strongly suggest the importance of the provision of a quality Catholic education and the development of Catholic leaders as central to the Spiritan educational mission and thus confirm findings from Spiritan documentation and literature.

Though it can be compared to other kinds of schools, the Christian school is, according to McCann, characterised in the following way:

[Its] Referent group is the Church, not a social class ... it looks to the people of God, local and universal, of this age and of all ages, committed and non-committed. Its Relationships are based on Community not a gathering of the like-minded, but a unity of differences, young and old, committed and lukewarm, saints and sinners with very different versions of what it is to be Christian. Its Educational purpose is Redemption ... Its Result is the disciple, a follower of Jesus, still a sinner but filled with hope. (McCann 2003, p. 163)

If, within the context of the teachings of Pope Francis, ‘we are to be truly Christian then we are called to live with others and for others’ (CSP 2014, p. 27). The Catholic school must be a living witness to the church’s mission (Collins 2012, p. 74; Dorr 2012) and bear witness to justice within its own structures and practices. (Dorr 2012, p. 269).

The perception of fee charging Spiritan schools as inward-looking, ‘elite’ (McCann 2003) schools and ‘bastions of privilege’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 12) and the apparent lacuna which characterises their mission to serve in Irish society, as evidenced in the findings of this research, raise questions in relation to the manner in which these schools bear witness to their mission as Christian and Catholic schools. The question also arises as to whether any Catholic fee charging school, which by its very structure excludes those who cannot afford to pay, can bear witness to the espoused mission to offer integral service and to opt for the poor? Findings strongly indicate that fee charging Spiritan schools can be perceived as communities of memory, elite institutions and elite Catholic schools characterised by a strong sense of community, but the question arises as to what extent these schools are Christian schools that witness to the People of God in an Irish context.

### **5.3.3 Finding 6: Stakeholders perceive that Spiritan schools use their advantages to serve others**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the advantages conferred by a fee charging education, in terms of providing a broad holistic academic education and extra-curricular activities, are widely documented. While there was a clear acknowledgment among participants in this study of these advantages, there was a corresponding imperative

to use these advantages, in service of others or, to ameliorate the circumstances of those economically less fortunate. The mantra ‘to whom much is given’ echoed in responses across all participant groups. Findings from this study indicate, a strong perception among stakeholders, that students who benefited from a privileged Catholic and Spiritan education, which is characterised by a strong academic focus and high rates of progression to third-level, would themselves in later life occupy leadership roles in society which constituted a platform from which they could ‘give back’ to society. This finds resonance with O’Neill’s description of the sons of Irish wealthy Catholic families who were educated in elite schools and ‘joined a tiny minority of the Irish population by virtue of this expensive and holistic education, and for the most part went on to occupy positions in life that were either financially or socially desirable’ (O’Neill 2014, p. 208).

Though not overtly stated, there appeared an underlying assumption that, in using advantage in service of others, a type of equality, balance, or justification for privilege was achieved. Echoing middle class and elite Catholics’ historical understanding of equality of opportunity there may also be an underlying assumption that ‘those with the greatest abilities, talents and hereditary advantage would triumph’ (O’Neill 2014, p. 205).

While there was consensus among participants in relation to the advantages conferred by a fee charging education, findings from this study indicated a spectrum of opinion, accompanied at times by a notable defensiveness on behalf of participants, in response to the question as to whether or not these schools contribute to educational inequality. Advantages received in fee charging schools did not necessarily or automatically disadvantage those who did not attend these schools. Findings strongly support Hederman’s view that fee charging schools set the bar for other schools and highlight the inadequacies of the public sector (Hederman 2012).



When asked to elaborate on the recent decision (2015) to remain within the fee charging structure, the PR made the following remarks:

What came out of that (Chapter 2012) was an in-depth feasibility study undertaken on behalf of the DEA Board and also an ethos evaluation that was undertaken by the DEA Board and then the province did some research and study of its own ... the financial review ... basically said that it really wasn't ... it wouldn't be feasible. That the Department of Education wouldn't be willing to take on our schools and that the schools as they currently exist wouldn't survive ... not with the sort of facilities that it has or lands or stuff like that. So, given that that is not a feasibility, we are left with the situation, well, what do we do?

In response to the question as to whether or not it would be appropriate for fee charging schools to enter the Free Scheme, P2 remarked that '[school name] is a fee paying school and has to stay as such because we cannot offer what we offer in a non-fee paying environment. Simple. It would be a shame to dilute the educational standards of the college.' Findings from this study indicate a spectrum of opinion in response to the proposal that fee charging schools should enter the Free Scheme. This study found that 21.2% and 36.3% respectively 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', but a significant percentage of parents were unsure (28.9% 'don't know'). Parents might be happy for fee charging Spiritan schools to enter the Free Scheme if, as one parent echoing the sentiment expressed by the PR above stated, 'the quality of education and facilities provided [was] to be maintained' (PT 24/27).

It is interesting to note that the decision not to enter Blackrock College into the Free Scheme was arrived in 1967 because 'it was not possible to provide the breadth and quality of education being given at Blackrock while operating within the limits of the so-called "Free Education" announced by Donagh O'Malley in 1966' (Farragher and Wyer 1995, p. 346). According to the PR, maintenance of the quality of education and resources may not, however, have been the sole reason behind the decision not to enter fee charging Spiritan schools into the Free Scheme in 1967. He states:

I suppose personalities would have something to do with it but also, where the people who were building these individual schools saw themselves in relationship to the education sector in general, who they identified with and perhaps also the schools that they identified with, maybe in England, which tended to be on the same social par, tended to be fee charging.

Findings seem to suggest an apparent paradox between the Spiritan mission to serve the most poor and the decision, in 1967 and again in 2015, to stay within the fee charging structure, thus maintaining advantage and social segregation. Through maintaining a strong presence among the wealthy in society, there is a perception that the Spiritans are perpetuating educational elitism. Class differences in education ‘are not the result of some set of preconceived preferences; rather, they are the by-product of an on-going set of negotiations between agents and structures’ (Lynch and O’Riordan 1998, p. 444). Bearing in mind the preferred focus of Spiritan to the most poor, the question arises, ‘if Catholic patrons legitimise their position in education on the basis of moral righteousness then what happens if their involvement in fee-paying schools is in conflict with their legitimising armoury?’ (Lynch 1988).

#### **5.4 Concluding Thoughts**

Integral service (Dorr 2012) lies at the heart of Spiritan involvement in education (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2013, 2012, 2011; DEA 2011, 2006). Whilst fundraising is ‘the most prevalent activity’ engaged in within second-level Spiritan schools, the manner of, and extent to which, this fundraising is ‘integrated into a more active and critical approach’ is unclear (Dillon 2013). An interpretation of the findings of this study suggest a bias towards a narrow model of service inspired by a concern for the poor as opposed to an integral model of service inspired by an option for the poor (Dorr 2012, pp. 348-349). The great danger of a narrow model of service is that it can become ‘a substitute for radical social and economic reform’ (Grace 2002, p.74) and thus hinder the promotion of integral service.

The differing philosophies behind, and understandings of, the nature and function of immersion between Spiritan schools evidence the distinct difference in terms of the model of service currently in operation. Some Spiritan schools are operating out of a more traditional narrow benefactor style model of service rooted in ‘colonial attitudes and perceptions’ (IDEA, 2007), others are operating out of a more integral, substantive, solidarity-inspired and encounter-based partnership model. Whilst both approaches offer the potential to be transformational experiences, the latter would appear to reflect a more integral model of service characteristic of Spiritan mission.

It could be argued that, through their provision of a strong Catholic education as evidenced in, for example, commitment to RE as a core subject and resourcing of chaplaincy, fee charging Spiritan schools serve the spiritually poor. It could however, also be argued that, in the context of the declining vocations characteristic of the institutional church today, the retention of religious personnel within fee charging schools creates another type of inequality. It could also be argued that all Catholic schools face the challenge to serve the spiritually poor and that non-fee charging 'designated disadvantaged' Catholic schools face the added challenge of serving those who are both the materially and spiritually poor.

Bearing in mind the historical evolution of Spiritan schools, founded to secure vocations for the foreign missions, the strong missionary links between Spiritan schools and the developing world and the fact that charitable works are primarily directed towards those in developing world is unsurprising. Spiritan schools were initially established as 'self-contained' institutions, (Farragher 1988). It is unsurprising therefore, that a strong sense of community and commitment to those 'within' the Spiritan community is characteristic of these 'communities of memory' (Bellah et al. 1985). This can however result in the perception of these schools as mono-cultural and self-perpetuating bubbles of privilege. At the very least, this study raises questions regarding the role these schools play in serving Irish society. There is, however, a growing awareness of the need to serve the materially poor in an Irish context and a commitment to increase diversity within fee charging Spiritan schools.

Whilst there is a diversity of services provided by the Spiritans in Ireland there has been a notable lack of diversity in terms of the schools for which the Spiritans have been responsible, catering almost exclusively for the materially wealthy (Keating 2006). It is important to acknowledge the historical evolution of Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools within the context of the historical social stratification, among and within religious congregations themselves and, among the schools for which they catered.

The 'quandary' (P4) of inheriting the poisoned chalice that is the monolithic Irish education system is echoed in the following remark:

we take these guys who are in an unequal position and we open them up to a whole variety of experiences outside themselves and outside their school and you hope that, in time, that they will make proper decisions and right decisions ethically in their workplaces and beyond to the benefit of the poor. It is a quandary. They have been beneficiaries to an unequal system. Now I don't think it's their fault, or their parents' fault by virtue of the fact that they chose the school. (P4)

The lack of social diversity within fee charging Spiritan schools could be seen to be in conflict with the founding mission of the Spiritans and the recent decision (2015) to stay within the fee charging sector raises further questions in relation to the espoused Spiritan mission to serve the most poor.

In the concluding chapter of this study (Chapter Six) a series of recommendations is presented and suggestions for further research are provided.

## Chapter 6

### Recommendations and Conclusion

#### 6.1 Introduction

Findings from this study were reported (Chapter Four) and interpreted (Chapter Five). Chapter Six concludes the study by providing an evaluation of the study and by presenting a number of recommendations and proposals for future research.

#### 6.2 Evaluation of the study

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. (Adichie 2009)

Criticisms of fee charging schools are widely documented. The public domain is, however, characterised by an absence of literature that examines the contribution that fee charging schools make to Irish society. While not a defence of fee charging schools, this study presented the varied and multiple stories of, and gave a voice to, the previously silent stakeholders ‘inside’ fee charging Spiritan schools. In so-doing this study is the first of its kind and fills a significant gap in the literature. In exploring the nature of service of second-level fee charging Spiritan schools as perceived by parents, principals and patron body this study presented a rich tapestry and broad spectrum of opinion. The ‘recurring and uneasy tension’ between the espoused Spiritan mission to serve the most poor and Spiritan patronage of fee charging schools which permeated the study, made for uncomfortable reading. This ‘paradox’ was, however, presented in a balanced way. In relation to the parental voice, the study could however have benefited from a greater sample of responses, from *all* five schools thus ensuring a more robust representation of all second-level fee charging Spiritan schools in Ireland. The study would, I believe, have been further enriched by the inclusion of the voices of teachers and pupils (both past and present).

### **6.3 Recommendations**

The findings of this study suggest three key recommendations for consideration by those engaged in Spiritan education:

#### **6.3.1 Re-imagine Spiritan identity and mission**

While they have recently reaffirmed their commitment to their apostolate in education, the Spiritans are eager to ensure that all of their schools are Spiritan in nature and bear witness to the Spiritan mission. This process of re-imagining Spiritan mission requires a serious re-thinking and re-defining of the distinctive and pervasive but equally elusive reality that is Spiritan mission if it is to remain faithful to its original charism as envisaged by its founders. As a consequence of the increasing absence of ‘on the ground’ Spiritan personnel, Spiritan schools, under the leadership of their principals and guided by their trustees, are facing the challenge to redefine and re-imagine Spiritan mission. The Mission Audit (2014) drew attention to the ‘recognisable theme’ underlying Spiritan documentation, namely, ‘a search for a relevant spirituality for today’s “frontier situations of mission”’ which implied ‘an authentic re-interpretation of the charism of the founders, in the idiom and context of today’s lived experience, marked as it is by unprecedented social, economic, ecological, technological and ecclesial change’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 4). This process of re-imagining and ‘re-interpretation’ was observed to be and perhaps could only be, by its very nature, a reactive as opposed to a proactive endeavour.

You know, if you’re born and raised a Catholic you never really think about being a Catholic ... having Spiritans around meant that you never really thought about the mission. I don’t know if they thought about the mission or if they sat down and said ‘are we fulfilling the mission? Has the mission changed?’ It certainly has been let slide I think. Nobody has actually stopped and said ‘hang on, where are we at right now?’ (P1)

The PR concurred, stating that ‘we [as Spiritans] haven’t been particularly good at modelling or articulating what we want’

Whilst acknowledging the positive nature of this handing over, this collaborative process, still in its infancy, is at times accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and reluctance.

### **6.3.2 Build on the firm foundations of the past with an eye to the future**

In terms of their mission in Ireland, the original intention of the Spiritans was very clear; ‘involvement in Ireland was to be a very limited operation: just sufficient to secure the missionaries required for the English-speaking territories (Farragher 1988, p. 120; Farragher and Wyer 1995, p. 56). Given the fact that, since the foundation of the first Spiritan school (Blackrock College) in 1860, over 887 past pupils of Blackrock College alone have entered religious life and most recent evidence suggests that Blackrock and Rockwell Colleges ‘are estimated to have “produced” approximately 1,000 Spiritan priests each’ (McEvoy 2014, p. 24), it could be argued that their mission was successful. Bearing the demographics of the Irish Province in mind, the lack of ‘on the ground’ Spiritan personnel and the fact that, for example, the last vocation for the priesthood in Blackrock College left in 1980, numbers of vocations can no longer be used as a criterion for evaluating the success of the Spiritan mission of service in education.

What can be considered constitutive of Spiritan mission both now and in the future? The Spiritans clearly outline their criteria for evaluation and justification for their involvement in education according to a set of criteria (see Appendix I). At the heart of these criteria is a commitment to promoting education ‘for global co-operation, for peace and harmony, for dialogue.’ It is an education offering ‘service to society and access to empowering knowledge, skills and the means of expression to the poor and powerless’, inspired by advocacy ‘for the respect ... the dignity of each person – especially the poor and the voiceless’ (Conaty 2013, p. 93). In this sense the service envisaged is integral service. It could be argued that fee charging Spiritan schools bear witness to this integral service and fulfil the criteria (Appendices A and I) in different ways and to varying degrees.

In terms of their educational purpose, all Spiritan schools (fee charging and non-fee charging) have, throughout their history, consistently demonstrated strong and unwavering commitment to reaching out to those less fortunate, raising money, raising awareness of privilege and plight and educating students imbued with a Catholic social conscience, many of whom have changed society for the better. These are the foundations and building blocks of Spiritan mission in education laid by generations of missionaries who dedicated their lives in service of others and of

those in most need. The presence of Spiritan missionaries in Spiritan schools may be dwindling, but their legacy lives on. Spiritan schools as Catholic schools ‘are called to minister not to the past but to the present and for the future. Wistfully longing for the days of yore is a trap we dare not fall into’ (Meehan 2008, p. 204). In the context of the ministry of Pope Francis, Christians need to avoid the ‘temptation ... of seeking to return to a past that no longer exists’ (CSP 2014, p. 27). Instead, Christians are called to live out their faith in the world in which they finds themselves’ (ibid., p. 27). We are where we are.

In terms of current and future practice there are two school-based endeavours which, it could be argued, offer real potential in terms of witnessing to the Spiritan mission of integral service in fee charging schools. These are development education and service learning (in the form of encounter-based immersion programmes and pastoral placements). In relation to strategic financial planning at school board level, access programmes, which by their very nature seek to increase social diversity, need also to be addressed.

### **6.3.3 Implement proposals for action**

In 2013 a working group was set up to introduce DE (development education) to all second-level Spiritan schools. I was a member of that group. All second-level Spiritan schools are members of the Spiritan school network for Development Education and affiliated to WorldWise Global schools (WWGS), the education body of Irish Aid (DEA 2015, p. 54). Development Education is ‘an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live’ (Irish Aid, 2003, p.9). It is about ‘supporting people in understanding, and in acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives and others at personal, community, national and international levels’ (ibid., p.9). DE is a ‘quality education with a global perspective’ that focuses on social justice, moving away from the ‘charity model’ to one of active global citizenship where students engage with social issues on their own terms (White 2015, p. 57). It is a student-led educational endeavour. Through DE experiential learning activities, which develop students’ understanding of social justice, the belief is engendered in students that they can and should make a difference.



DE offers a vehicle for Spiritan mission in its integral sense and represents an authentic move towards integral service. The key informants in this study acknowledged the importance of DE as a manifestation of Spiritan mission in education.

Immersion programmes can ‘develop servant leaders through discovering that personal happiness can be achieved by being selfless and through caring for others’ (O’Reilly 2015, p. 77). These experiences ‘can also can have a powerful effect on faith development and have the potential to be transformative’ (ibid., p. 77). While on pastoral placements in ‘day care facilities, special needs schools and long stay homes’, students ‘can encounter a range of intellectual, physical, emotional and sensory disabilities for the first time’ (Ryan 2015, p. 78). These service learning programmes have the potential to ‘truly engage a young person’s head, heart and hands’ (ibid., p. 79). Service learning programmes can ‘help students learn how to love in a very powerful manner that may have a long-term impact on their lives’ (ibid., p. 79).

There is however, a need to assess the long-term impact of these programmes. Great care is required when ‘planning, executing and de-briefing’ such immersion trips and ‘an in-depth follow-up is necessary, engaging critically with the question of Christian faith and human suffering’ (O’Reilly 2015, p. 77). Principals emphasised the need for students to engage in appropriate preparation for, and subsequent reflection on, the immersion experience, which ‘takes them to, sometimes, quite an uncomfortable place in their heads, and physically as well sometimes, that they have to engage in a much fuller and interactive way with this whole idea of development education’ (P4). Students are also encouraged to share their experience with other students. The provincial also affirmed the importance of an encounter-based model of immersion and stressed the need for pre and post reflection.

While there is no fixed template in situ in regard to the manner in which a social integration access programme is to be implemented, findings from this study and Spiritan documentation indicate a strong commitment both among and within fee charging schools for such a programme.

## **6.4 Suggestions for Future Research**

This study suggests a number of possible themes for future research:

### **6.4.1 Go ye afar!**

In order to ascertain the extent to which fee charging Spiritan schools bear witness to their mission of integral service, longitudinal studies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, trend and cohort) could be undertaken. Although there is in current research circles a bias towards quantitative hard science (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), longitudinal qualitative studies could contribute rich data in relation to Spiritan mission in education. Bearing in mind the strong sense of community characteristic of Spiritan schools and the active past pupils' unions and parents' associations, a longitudinal study across the generations, inclusive of authenticated anecdotal evidence and other types of evidence, could assist in, the process of re-imagining and re-defining Spiritan identity and, into the future in, assessing the lasting impact in terms of sustained commitment to Spiritan mission.

### **6.4.2 Telling the story**

In both formal and informal discussions relating to the contribution made by fee charging schools in general and fee charging Spiritan schools in particular, past pupils of these institutions spoke at times passionately, mostly fondly, but rarely critically, of their educational experience at these institutions. What struck me was that all of the conversations conducted entailed anecdotes that often shed light on the operative as opposed to the espoused mission of these schools. While anecdotes 'have a low status in scholarly writings' (Manen, cited in Simons 2009, p. 77) and can be easily dismissed, they can have the power 'as a methodological device ... to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us' (ibid.). Speaking of the difficulty of retaining objectivity when remembering one's school days, Looney states:

You have to rely for the narrative, after all, on a very biased, inexperienced, impressionable historian – yourself, aged five or ten or fourteen. That imperfect chronicler tends to remember all teachers as towering autocrats, given to capricious outbursts of kindness or unpredictable harshness, all winter school days wet and cold, all summer holidays endlessly sunny. (Looney 2003, p. 244)

While caution is required in relying on anecdotal evidence, and the danger of falling into the trap of glamourising and re-writing ‘the good old days’ – which were at times anything but good – is to be avoided at all costs, longitudinal studies embracing ‘authenticated’ anecdotes that are ‘grounded in experience, corroborated by other evidence where relevant and credible for an understanding of the case’ have the potential to ‘offer insight into the idiosyncratic nature of particular events and experience that cannot be captured by other means’ (Simons 2009, p. 77).

### **6.4.3 Beyond the school gates**

Whilst acknowledging the potentially transformative experience of social outreach and immersion projects and the aspiration of Spiritan schools to inspire in their students a desire to embrace the Spiritan mission to serve the poor, participants in this study recognised the potentially limited nature of service learning and social justice programmes in relation to their effectiveness, both in addressing poverty and in creating a lasting impact on the students involved. Principal 4 spoke of the importance of experiences which take students ‘out of their comfort zone’ and expose them ‘to something that is radically different’ but questioned the effectiveness and lasting impact of such experiences. ‘You are’, as principal 5 also notes ‘still a tourist for the week’.

Principals also acknowledged the limited capacity of any school to generate students imbued with a spirit of service: ‘I don’t think any school could claim to be producing people who are committed to service or who have global vision’ (P1). In terms of inspiring in their students a lasting and lifelong commitment to Spiritan mission beyond the school gates, the schools principals, though optimistic, were acutely aware of the ‘hit and hope’ nature of this educational enterprise. ‘Your hope is [that the students] will have positive enough experiences and will make value systems and judgments based on their experiences to assist people who are not getting the same privileged chance that they might have got’ (P4). A longitudinal study assessing the attitudes towards, and sustained involvement of, past pupils who engaged in service learning (immersion, pastoral placements) in their later years in school (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year) and ideally at certain points in later life could render some very interesting insights into the role of Spiritan schools in promoting Spiritan mission.

#### **6.4.4 Cross-case analysis**

But our Spiritan schools stand as a community of schools or a community of communities. St. Paul reminds us that in the Christian community we form one body. When one school is weak all our schools are weak. We see glaring inequalities in our world and in our society. I would hope that our schools would not fall in to the vicious circle where the strong grow stronger and the weak become weaker. It is a structure of inequality that we denounce in society. Let's ensure that it doesn't happen in our midst. (Whelan 2016)

Findings from this study indicate diversity among fee charging Spiritan schools. Geography and economics lie at the heart of this diversity. It is, according to one principal 'less homogenous in a rural environment, in a co-ed environment, in maybe an all-day environment'. Another principal referred to the homogenous 'socio-economic grouping of the natural catchment area' characteristic of his/her school.

Based on the findings from this study, and from DES (2013) which indicate a significant disparity among fee charging schools in terms of the fees charged, it is clear that there is diversity among fee charging schools. A cross-analysis study comparing the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and practices of the stakeholders across the different fee charging Spiritan schools could yield rich data and shed light on the diversity among fee charging Spiritan schools.

#### **6.5 Conclusion**

The strong sense of community and the collective commitment, among all the stakeholder groups, to the development of Spiritan identity are signs of hope for the future of fee charging Spiritan schools. Through well-planned educational initiatives (e.g. DE), encounter-based service learning programmes and social integration access programmes, Christian solidarity *with* the poor can be realised and the long-established outstanding tradition of fundraising can be developed within the context of a more integral and critical analysis-based model of service. It is however important, in implementing new programmes or, in developing existing ones, that the principle of 'conscious agency' (Johnson and Wilson 2006) in partnership, understood as the process of 'constantly reflecting on the dynamics of who is inputting/benefitting the most' (McCarthy 2010, p. 27-28), is adhered to. A new encounter-based partnership paradigm is sought, not 'an old model dressed up as something new' (McCarthy 2010, p. 29).

In striving to comprehend more fully the extent to which fee charging Spiritan schools, both individually and collectively, bear witness to an integral mission of service, this study also proposes the undertaking of longitudinal, narrative and cross-case analysis research.

## 6.6 Endnote

Anyone with gumption and with a sharp mind will take the measure of two things:  
what's said and what's done (Heaney; Beowulf)

At the heart of this study is a complex and real-life problem. While it is 'a very human trait to be mindful of providing a better life for one's children, and education remains a key element in social mobility in both Britain and Ireland today' (O'Neill 2014, p. 208), each individual Christian and every community is called 'to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor' (Pope Francis 2013, para 187) which means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty' (ibid., para 188). It could be argued that, in relation to fee charging schools, 'those who are currently benefiting handsomely from educational inequality have no reason to want change, and in political terms, they constitute a major interest group in Irish political and educational life' (Hardiman, 1998; Lynch, 1990 cited in Lynch 2001, p. 401). The following remark made by the patron representative presents a very different perspective:

if you opt out, if you give up the ghost because it's not fitting into your nice niche of who you say you want to be - what becomes of them? [fee charging Spiritan schools]...there is a big danger that schools like ours could just become private companies that *do* education.

Maintaining the creative tension between providing and/or availing of fee charging education and bearing witness to the Spiritan mission to serve the most poor is an on-going challenge facing all stakeholders in fee charging Spiritan schools. It is worth stating that the word Trustee has at its root the word 'trust'. There is a palpable sense that, in retaining a presence in education, the Spiritans are truly demonstrating an Openness to the Spirit and putting their nets out into the deep (Luke 5:4).

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## **List of Appendices**

### **Appendix A: The Spiritan Core Values in Education**

The Spiritan Education Ethos is guided by and grounded in seven core values:

#### **1. Openness to the Spirit**

We are guided by the Holy Spirit in our relationships, choices, behaviours and decisions.

#### **2. A Sense of Community**

Working together as a community of schools, we value diversity as a gift from God and the foundation for building communities each and every day.

#### **3. Concern for the Poor**

We live in an unequal world where resources are unevenly distributed. From our privileged position we are called to recognise our role in working together to create a just world.

#### **4. Commitment to Service**

Following the examples of Jesus, the gifts and talents that we are blessed with are freely offered in the service of each other and in all the communities.

#### **5. Global Vision**

Reflecting the missionary outlook of the Congregation, Spiritan education works for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice and poverty.

#### **6. High Educational Standards**

The realisation of each person's human and spiritual potential to strive for excellence in all areas of life.

#### **7. Personal and Faith Development**

The moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, social and cultural aspects of each student's development is at the heart of the Spiritan vision of Education.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions for Principals

1. How do you understand your school in the Spiritan Tradition?
  - What words would you use to describe the ethos of your school?
2. What would you regard as the main objectives of your school?
3. Findings from the recent Questionnaire on the Provision of Development Education in Spiritan Second-Level Schools (Draft Report Dillon 2013) indicated that:
  - ‘though development education is regarded ... as much more than “charity”, the most prevalent activity engaged in ... is “fundraising”’
  - ‘it is unclear ... how fundraising in the schools is integrated into a more active and critical approach to development education’

In the light of this, how are the Spiritan core values of ‘global vision’, ‘commitment to service’ and ‘concern for the poor’ promoted in your school?

4. How do you believe ‘commitment to service’ and ‘concern for the poor’ can be embraced by students who do not (personally) experience material poverty?
5. The 1994 Spiritan Chapter called for fee-paying schools ‘to explore the possibility of admitting or helping disadvantaged students’ and one of the powers of the DEA [The Memorandum of Association of the DEA, {1 (B) (8) 1999}] is to ‘create, endow, establish, or otherwise found or grant educational scholarships.’
  - How has this been achieved in your school to date?
6. How do Spiritan fee-paying schools provide education for the transformation of Irish society today?
7. One of the powers of the DEA [The Memorandum of Association of the DEA, {1 (B) (20) 1999}] is to ‘provide or contribute towards the salaries, wages, stipends, or other remuneration of chaplains’ in Spiritan schools/colleges.
  - What chaplaincy/liturgical services does your school currently provide?
  - How does your school promote the spiritual development of its students?
8. The aim of the first French Spiritans in Ireland was to invite young Irish men to join the Spiritan Mission. How, in your opinion, has Spiritan mission in your school changed over the years?
9. It has been said that fee-paying schools contribute to social class division and educational inequality in Ireland (Lynch 1988; 2001; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch and Moran 2006). What is your response to this?
10. In their most recent Chapter (2012), the Spiritans committed themselves to exploring the feasibility of including all Spiritan schools in the non-fee-paying sector.
  - What do you regard as the key questions for debate in this discussion?
  - How do you see the future of fee-paying Spiritan schools in Ireland?

## Appendix C: Interview Questions for Patron Representative

1. Service of the ‘most poor’ constitutes the ‘preferred focus’ of Spiritan mission (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2012) and Spiritan mission in education ‘should be driven by ... a clear option for the most vulnerable and materially poor’. Nevertheless, fee-paying Spiritan schools ‘are perceived to be places of advantage rather than disadvantage’ (Spiritan Province of Ireland 2011). In the light of this:
  - What is your current understanding of Spiritan patronage of fee-paying schools?
  - In what way do fee-paying Spiritan schools serve the poor?
2. What role do you think fee-paying Spiritan schools play in providing education for the transformation of Irish society?
3. Findings from the recent Questionnaire on the Provision of Development Education in Spiritan Second-Level Schools (Draft Report Dillon 2013) indicated that:
  - ‘though development education is regarded ... as much more than “charity”, the most prevalent activity engaged in ... is “fundraising”’
  - ‘it is unclear ... how fundraising in the schools is integrated into a more active and critical approach to development education, if it is, or the extent to which it might offer a mixed or stereotyped message when it comes to global relations of justice, equality and human rights’. In the light of this:
    - How do fee-paying Spiritan schools support Spiritan missionary work projects (at home and abroad)?
    - How do fee-paying Spiritan schools promote the core value of ‘global vision’ and ‘work for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice and poverty’?
4. How do you believe ‘commitment to service’ and ‘concern for the poor’ can be embraced by students who do not (personally) experience material poverty?
5. It has been said that fee-paying schools contribute to social class division and educational inequality in Ireland (Lynch 1988; 2001; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch and Moran 2006). What is your response to this?
6. The 1994 Spiritan Chapter called for fee-paying schools ‘to explore the possibility of admitting or helping disadvantaged students’ and one of the powers of the DEA [The Memorandum of Association of the DEA, {1 (B) (8) 1999}] is to ‘create, endow, establish, or otherwise found or grant educational scholarships.’
  - What schemes were/are currently being undertaken to encourage social inclusion in fee-paying Spiritan schools?
7. One of the powers of the DEA [The Memorandum of Association of the DEA, {1 (B) (20) 1999}] is to ‘provide or contribute towards the salaries, wages, stipends, or other remuneration of chaplains’ in Spiritan schools/colleges.
  - Are chaplains being provided in fee-paying Spiritan schools?

- In what other ways does the DEA currently support the spiritual development of students in fee-paying Spiritan schools?
8. The Spiritans recently committed themselves to exploring the feasibility of including all their schools in the non-fee-paying sector (Chapter 2012).
- What do you regard as the key questions for debate in this discussion?
  - How do you see the future of fee-paying Spiritan schools in Ireland?

## **Appendix D: Parental Survey Questionnaire**

### **Fee-paying Spiritan schools**

This survey aims to explore the reasons why parents choose to send their sons/daughters to fee-paying Spiritan schools. It also seeks to examine parents' understanding of the service offered by these schools (and in particular their understanding of the manner in which these schools serve the poor). Questions 3–16 are taken from the Factors Determining School Choice Survey compiled for the Commission for Education of the Irish Bishops' Conference (O'Mahony 2008).

This survey should take only 5 minutes to complete. Please click on the SUBMIT button once after the last question. Please be assured that your response will remain confidential. Your co-operation is much appreciated.

Erica Sheehan

### **Section A: Your Son/Daughter and the School**

1. Which of the following second-level schools does your son/daughter attend?
  - ☐ Blackrock College
  - ☐ St Mary's College
  - ☐ St Michael's College
  - ☐ Rockwell College
  - ☐ Willow Park First Year
  
2. How many of your children are currently attending this school?
  - ☐ One
  - ☐ More than one
  
3. When did you make the decision to apply to send your son/daughter to this school?
  - ☐ Shortly before the school year opened
  - ☐ During the previous year
  - ☐ We made this decision many years ago.
  
4. Which statement best describes your position when you chose this school?
  - ☐ This school was our first choice
  - ☐ Other schools with places were available
  - ☐ This school was the only one with a place available



5. What is the religion of your son/daughter?

- ☐ Roman Catholic
- ☐ Church of Ireland
- ☐ Presbyterian
- ☐ Methodist
- ☐ Other Christian Church
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Jehovah Witness
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ no religion
- ☐ other religion

6. Would you consider this school to be your local secondary school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Is this the only school available to your son/daughter within a reasonable distance?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. How easy or difficult was it to have your son/daughter enrolled in the school?

- ☐ It was very easy
- ☐ It was easy
- ☐ It was neither easy nor difficult
- ☐ It was difficult
- ☐ It was very difficult

## **Section B: School Choice**

9. The quality of the education it provides

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor unimportant
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ Very Unimportant

10. The fact that other parents with a similar standard of living to yours send their children to the school

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor unimportant
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ Very Unimportant

11. The fact that friends of your son/daughter would also be attending this school

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor unimportant
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ Very Unimportant

12. The fact that you or other members of your family have attended this school

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor unimportant
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ Very Unimportant

13. The fact that other parents with a similar religion to yours send their children to the school

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor unimportant
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ Very Unimportant

14. The fact that the school is under the management of a religious denomination (i.e. the Spiritans)

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor unimportant
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ Very Unimportant

15. The extra-curricular activities it provides

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor unimportant
- ☐ Unimportant
- ☐ Very Unimportant

16. Article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland says “the State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.” Which of the following three statements best describes your view on this statement?

- ☐ Education is the sole responsibility of the school
- ☐ Education is the sole responsibility of the parents
- ☐ Education is a shared responsibility between parents and the school

### **Section C: Fee-paying schools in Ireland today**

17. “The State should continue to pay the salaries of teachers employed in second-level fee-paying schools”

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Don’t know
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

18. What is your response to the changes currently being proposed by the Government in regard to the admission policies of secondary schools?

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Don’t know
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

19. “Fee-paying schools contribute to social class division and educational inequality in Ireland” (Lynch 1988; 2001; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch and Moran 2006).

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Don’t know
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

### **Section D: Fee-paying Spiritan schools in Ireland today**

20. “I would think it appropriate for the fee-paying Spiritan school my son/daughter attends to enter the Free Scheme”

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Don’t know
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

21. “Fee-paying Spiritan schools serve the poor”

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Don’t know
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

22. Please explain your answer to the previous question (Question 21)

23. What role, if any, do you think fee-paying Spiritan schools play in providing education for the transformation of Irish society?

## **Appendix E: Email sent to parents with link to survey**

Dear Parents/ Guardians

My name is Erica Sheehan and I am a teacher in Willow Park First Year. I have been teaching in Willow for 17 years and am currently engaged in research for my doctoral thesis. The key focus of this research is to explore how fee-paying Spiritan schools, through the eyes of relevant stakeholders (Parents, Management, Teachers), serve the poor.

Paramount to this research is ascertaining the reasons parents choose to send their children to fee-paying Spiritan schools. This research also seeks to examine parents' understanding of the services offered by these schools.

Below is a link to my research survey, and I would much appreciate if you would take the time to complete it. This survey should take only 5 minutes to complete.

Please be assured that your responses will remain completely confidential.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1t1WAxV5U2KCvflvXxkL-ISQPSE1cUK43pxWjH0qaumU/viewform>

Thanks again

Best Regards

Erica

## **Appendix F: Data Collection and Analysis Timeline**

### **Preface: The Emergence of the Research Question**

Nov 2011

- Spiritan Day of Reflection: The question!
- An inventory of my observations based on fifteen years in a Spiritan fee charging school
- July 2012 Proposal for research project via EdDoc submitted
- Foreshadowing issues

### **Phase 1: Initial Documentary Analysis and Philosophical Literature Review**

September 2012–June 2013

- Documentary Analysis Phase 1 (Blackrock College Archives and Kimmage Manor)
- Gatekeeper approached re. access
- Literature Review 1 (Philosophical) re. Catholic fee charging schools
- Analysis 1: (coding, writing memos, ‘phrases, ideas, concepts and hunches’ and taking notes (Creswell 2012, p. 243) of documents and literature and the emergence of recurring themes through constant comparison method
- Emerging Themes explored in Pilot Project undertaken

*Stop & Review* codes and emerging themes from the documents

### **Phase 2: Refining and Developing Themes and Ethical Approval**

August 2013–October 2014

- Empirical Literature review (focused on perceived advantages of fee charging schools specifically)
- Ethics approval received

*Stop & Review:* deeper exploration of themes identified from the pilot study in devising the questions for the semi-structured interviews to follow (phase 3)

### **Phase 3: Fieldwork Part One**

October 2014–June 2015

- Semi-structured interviews with principals
- Parental questionnaire sent out
- Documentary Analysis Phase 2: The Mission Audit (McEvoy 2014), Spiritan Ethos and Faith Development Appraisal (Ethos Committee 2015)

- Analysis 2 of interview transcripts and questionnaire results and documents and the emergence of major themes and minor sub-themes through constant comparison method

***Stop & Review:*** codes and emerging themes from the documents and interview transcripts

#### **Phase 4: Fieldwork part two**

##### **September 2015–March 2016**

- Collection and Analysis of Parental questionnaire responses
- Interview with Patron Representative
- Analysis of interview transcript

***Stop & Review:*** codes and emerging themes from questionnaire and interview transcripts

#### **Phase 5: Establishing Major Themes for Writing the Report**

##### **Feb 2016–June 2016**

- ‘Preliminary exploratory analysis’ (Creswell 2012, p. 243) was undertaken to ‘obtain a general sense’ of all the data collected (phases 1–4)
- Literature Review 3: Integration of Spiritan documentation
- Finalising the major themes for the writing of the report

## Appendix G: Plain Language Statement

Dear participant,

0/0/2015

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

My name is Erica Sheehan and I am currently undertaking post-graduate research at DCU (School of Education Studies) under the supervision of Dr Sandra Cullen (Mater Dei Institute) and Professor Gerry McNamara (DCU). The title of my thesis is “Spiritan fee-paying schools ‘must speak for themselves’: Exploring the mission of service of second-level Spiritan fee-paying schools in Ireland”. The purpose of the research being undertaken (in part fulfilment of a Professional Doctorate in Education) is to explore the manner in which ‘service to one’s neighbour, particularly the most poor and vulnerable, the work of justice’ (Irish Episcopal Conference 2010 p. 55) is carried out in Spiritan fee-paying schools from the perspective of the relevant stakeholders (patrons, principals, teachers and parents). This intrinsic qualitative case study seeks to facilitate an open and balanced dialogue between the perspectives of those ‘within’ Spiritan fee-paying schools and the widely researched and documented critiques of fee-paying schools (Lynch 1988, Lynch and O’Riordan 1998, Lynch and Lodge 2002).

Please complete the following (Circle ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ for each of the following questions)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	Yes No
I understand the information provided	Yes No
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	Yes No
I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped	Yes No
I am aware that I am free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher or with DCU	Yes No

I wish my identity as participant to be known only to the researcher	Yes No
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I wish to retain anonymity but am aware that due to the small sample size of the case study complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed by the researcher	Yes No
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If you do not wish your name to be associated with the research findings in any way, please tick the following box.

☐

Please note that all information supplied as part of your participation in this research is subject to the established legal limitations on confidentiality. There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefit associated with your participation is that appropriate information will be generated by this qualitative research study. Upon completion of the research project, all data will be destroyed.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form and of the interview transcript will be given to you to keep. A brief summary of the findings will be shared with you upon completion of the research.

Erica Murphy

Participant’s Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name in Block Capitals: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H: Consent to Participate Letter

Dear Participant,

00/00/2015

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher or with DCU.

My name is Erica Sheehan and I am currently undertaking post-graduate research at DCU. The title of my thesis is “Spiritan fee-paying schools ‘must speak for themselves’: Exploring the mission of service of second-level Spiritan fee-paying schools in Ireland”. The purpose of the research being undertaken (in part fulfilment of a Professional Doctorate in Education) is to explore the manner in which ‘service to one’s neighbour, particularly the most poor and vulnerable, the work of justice’ (Irish Episcopal Conference 2010, p. 55) is carried out in Spiritan fee-paying schools from the perspective of the relevant stakeholders (patrons, principals, teachers and parents). This intrinsic qualitative case study seeks to facilitate an open and balanced dialogue between; the perspectives of those ‘within’ Spiritan fee-paying schools and the widely researched and documented critiques of fee-paying schools (Lynch 1988, Lynch and O’Riordan 1998, Lynch and Lodge 2002).

You are invited to participate in one audio-recorded interview of approximately 45 mins duration. A copy of the interview questions will be given to you in advance of the interview should you decide to participate.

Should you so wish, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as participant will be known only to the researcher. You should however be aware that complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed by the researcher.

The expected benefit associated with your participation is that appropriate information will be generated by this qualitative research study. A brief summary of the findings will be shared with you upon completion of the research.

For the duration of this research all data gathered will be kept in a locked, secure place, which only I have access to. Upon completion of the research project, all data will be destroyed.

Please note that all information supplied as part of your participation in this research is subject to the established legal limitations on confidentiality.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating in the study. My contact details are as follows: (e-mail [ericasheehan75@gmail.com](mailto:ericasheehan75@gmail.com)).

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: **The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000**



## **Appendix I: Criteria for the Evaluation and Justification of Spiritan Involvement in a work of education**

**Universality:** Education for global co-operation and the fulfilment of human aspirations

**Proclamation:** Education proclaiming the spiritual and moral values of God's Kingdom

**Service and Liberation:** Education offering service to society and access to empowering knowledge, skills and means of expression to the poor and powerless

**Dialogue:** Education for dialogue, fostering respect for people of other religions and cultures, and those of no faith or alienated from Church

**Inculturation:** Education for peace and harmony. Recognising the presence of God's Kingdom in the world and in every culture, including contemporary youth culture

**Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation:** Education and advocacy for the respect of Human Rights, the dignity of each person – especially the poor and voiceless. Respect for God's creation in the environment and the fair and just stewardship of the earth's limited resources.